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# BABES IN THE WOOD

A ROMANCE OF THE JUNGLES

BY

B. M. CROKER

'THIS IS THE FOREST PRIMEVAL'

LONGFELLOW

EIGHTH EDITION

METHUEN & CO. LTD.

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TO  
HAPPY MEMORIES  
OF  
THE C.P.



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# BABES IN THE WOOD

## CHAPTER I.

### THE FIRST PLUNGE

A DUSTY ticca għarri piled with luggage rattled into Howrah Station, Calcutta, precisely three minutes before the departure of the Nagpore Mail, and an active young man, with a fresh complexion and brand-new topee, burst from the conveyance, overpaid the driver, and ran on to the platform in pursuit of his baggage—which a swarm of vociferous coolies had confiscated and carried off. Having satisfied this clamouring crew, the breathless traveller flung himself into a first-class carriage, to the secret annoyance of a squarely built elderly gentleman, who had already arranged the compartment with a view to its exclusive enjoyment. He happened to be Richard, or Dick Kennedy, Traffic Superintendent of the line, a broad-minded Anglo-Indian of wide experience.

The panting interloper who arrived three hours previously by the incoming P. & O. was so boyishly keen to make his first start in life, that he had not wasted a moment on the attractions of ‘the City of Palaces,’ but was hurrying to take up his appointment without delay.

Philip Trafford, recently gazetted Assistant Conservator of Forests, had made no mistake respecting his choice of a profession. Natural history, zoology, and botany appealed to him when he was in blouses, and his was no childish whim. The taste remained

when he passed into 'Etons and tails'; he grew up still profoundly interested in the book of Nature, the lore of the trees and fields, and, in spite of the combined protestations of his mother and his guardian, put away from him the glamour and glory of a Bengal Cavalry regiment, and chose for his path in life 'Woods, Forests, and Freedom.'

His mother, Mrs. Vernon Trafford, a handsome, youthful-looking widow, cherished wide ambitions (social and matrimonial), and the presence of a tall son of three-and-twenty obtruded a date that nothing less than absence could efface. Philip's craving to go East was considered and approved; this predilection would remove him effectually from her orbit, and she eloquently urged the claims and the prizes of Indian Cavalry; but the enticements of a splendid uniform, two chargers, and even a blue and gold turban, failed to shake his decision. No; he saw himself as his own master, planting, felling, clearing vast State tracts of useless trees and under-growth, incidentally shooting record heads, fishing, swimming, wearing his oldest clothes, and enjoying a glorious time in the glorious East. Romantic and ignorant enthusiast!

Eventually Trafford had gained his heart's desire, a first-class certificate, and was now a fully qualified official, posted to an outlying district in the wildest circle of the Central Provinces.

By and by the new arrival and the old Indian fell into conversation. The latter had a nine hours' run before him, and was not altogether sorry for some companionship. He noted, with grim amusement, the young fellow's undisguised interest in the country through which they travelled (it was a line that not many years previously had driven its slow invincible progress into the heart of India's densest and most secluded jungles); the water buffaloes, prone and luxurious in muddy pools, flighty dancing cranes, and even the pariah dogs, were objects of this boy's

keen attention ; his quick brown eyes suffered little to escape them.

' And so you are bound for Pahari, I see,' observed Mr. Kennedy, pointing to a label.

' I am,' assented Trafford. ' Do you happen to know the place ? '

' Yes. I 'm afraid you will find it a bit lonely at first—it 's right off the line, on the border of the great Rodore Reserve. Your nearest neighbour will be Scruby, of the P.W.D., twelve miles away at Chandi. Stenhouse, your boss, makes a rule of starting at the beginning, and letting you know the worst at once ! '

' And is Pahari the worst ? ' asked the young man, with anxious interest.

' Well, yes, if you are fond of society.'

' No ; I hate what 's called Society. I want the real rough-and-tumble jungle life.'

' Then in that case perhaps you will be all right,' rejoined Mr. Kennedy, but his tone was doubtful, as he gravely considered his companion and studied his clean-cut features, well-knit frame, well-cut clothes and well-bred air. To all appearance he had never been out of the reach of Society, or ' roughed it,' in his born days ; and he met Trafford's happy eyes and smile of radiant self-confidence with secret concern. He was touched by the pathos of youth's sanguine hopes (having come across others of the same type, inexperienced wayfarers from the sheltered life, idealistic, sincere, enthusiastic), and his kind heart warmed to this boy who was so courteous and genial, so respectfully grateful for each crumb of information vouchsafed.

As the train thundered on through a flat and monotonous country, he gradually drew from his new acquaintance all the high hopes that abode in his heart. Trafford spoke of the dignity of his profession, the value of Forestry, of his own passion for the true, free, and only simple life ;—also of his expectations of good hunting, and congenial work.

## BABES IN THE WOOD

'So lots of work and the simple life is your ambition,' said the other slowly. 'Well, my boy, I think your prayers will be granted. Pahari affords both; but are you very sure that you understand the meaning of your aims? In India things are different to what they are in England.'

'Of course they are,' agreed Trafford eagerly, 'and so much the better. I've always wanted to come out here ever since I was a kid, and gobbled up every book on India that I could lay hands on.'

'I hope you will like the ancient, mystic, and mysterious East as much as you expect,' said Mr. Kennedy; 'it's an inscrutable country. Now let us see what is inside my tiffin basket.'

Being an experienced traveller, he carried with him a supply of ice and soda water, and a remarkably well-chosen luncheon, which he shared with Trafford—who had brought nothing in the shape of refreshments except a briar-wood pipe. Over the cold fowl and sandwiches, the pair became more and more intimate, and the host said—

'I see you are a water drinker. Stick to it, but get the water boiled. You must buy a couple of goats or a cow.'

'A cow! For what?'

'Merely the usual reason—milk. Do you suppose you will have a milkman calling and clattering his cans in the jungle? There is not even a village at Pahari—you must be your own village.'

'Then I am afraid I shall have a blue look out, for I've brought nothing but my clothes, and cartridges, and some arsenical soap for curing skins.'

'What! You've brought no kit, no stores, no bedding?'

'No; except clothes, guns, and books—not a single blessed thing!'

Mr. Kennedy put down his fork, and gazed at Trafford with an incredulous expression in his granite grey eyes.

' You see, sir, I only landed this morning, got my instructions, and just caught the train.'

' Um—Stenhouse is a bachelor, of course, but I 'm sure he never dreamt that you were starting for the jungle as bare of baggage as a wild dog. I 've been to Pahari—it 's just a little bungalow on the edge of the Rodore forest—three rooms—a couple of chairs—a table—and a string charpoy—that 's about the lot.'

' O Lord ! ' ejaculated Trafford.

' You did not expect a furnished house, did you ? '

' No ; but I thought there would be some place where I could put up, and look round. What do other greenhorns do ? '

' The old hands help them. In this country we all help one another—it 's our unwritten law. But I say, didn't your mother give you spoons, and sheets, and things ? '

' No ; she gave me a thermometer, and a lace tea-cloth ; she had heard that everything was to be had out here far better than at home, and there were bazaars all over the place. There is a chap in the train who says he is my bearer, and the fellow in charge of the bungalow is sending a pony to Karwassa to meet me.'

' Karwassa is my station,' said Mr. Kennedy, ' and we will be there in ten minutes. You 'd better put up with us for the night—indeed, for several nights. My wife will help you, and teach you how to run a house, get your servants, and lend you bedding.'

' It is most awfully good of you, sir—but I—I am quite a stranger—I—er—I 'll be all right. I 'll muddle along somehow, and I think I 'll get on to Pahari at once.'

' Rubbish ! ' exclaimed Mr. Kennedy impatiently. ' We are all strangers in a strange land. I am an old hand ; my wife has mothered half the boys within fifty miles, one more or less is nothing. You had better be getting your traps together, for this

train does not stop any time, and you come home with me. Ah! here we are !'

Karwassa proved to be a considerable station and junction ; by no means the usual shed, tank, and platform.

Richard Kennedy, respectfully received by a couple of bustling baboos, was evidently on his own ground ; a mere wave of his hand, and the compartment was emptied as if by magic, and its contents carefully transported.

Then as the great mail train loomed away into the tropical night, its red lamp growing fainter and fainter, the orange disc of an Indian moon rose slowly over the dark jungle, and dominated the scene.

Presently Trafford found himself following his imperious acquaintance through a dim-scented garden—which gave forth the combined perfumes of roses and jasmine—to where lights streamed from the open doors of a long bungalow, and from the same doors also streamed a loud company of small dogs, eager to welcome their master. They entered (dogs and men) through a verandah into a spacious drawing-room, lit by shaded lamps, and well supplied with sofas and easy chairs. Here a slim dark-eyed lady hurried forward, and kissed her husband, and exclaimed—

‘ Oh, Dick, how late you are ! ’

‘ Not more than half an hour. See,’ moving aside, ‘ I have brought you a guest. This is the young fellow who has come out instead of Frost,’ and turning about, he added with a laugh, ‘ I don’t think I know your name yet ? ’

‘ Trafford—Philip Trafford.’

‘ Oh, Mr. Trafford,’ said the lady, with a smile, and a flash of white teeth, ‘ I am so pleased to see you. My husband seldom returns alone. He generally brings a friend.’

‘ But he only came across me in the train. I blundered into his carriage at the last moment.’

'Yes, and he is so mad keen on getting to Pahari, he came almost direct from the steamer'; here Mr. Kennedy looked significantly at his wife. 'Pahari is flattered. Eh?'

'Oh, people always begin like that,' she declared. 'I believe I did it myself! It is only natural to want to see new things at *once*—especially when one is young. Now please come along,' turning to Trafford, 'and I will show you your room.'

As she spoke she led the way across a sort of hall, and calling a servant gave directions in Hindustani, before she ushered her guest into a lofty matted chamber, supplied with every English comfort, including a cheval-glass and a flounced toilet-table.

'These are not the usual bachelor quarters,' she explained; 'it is my young ladies' room, and it happens to be ready. The bearer will send in your luggage and hot water. Please make yourself at home; dinner will be served in a quarter of an hour. You must be starving. By the way,' pausing on the threshold, 'this is very funny and Indian!' Of course you don't know who we are or even our names. My husband is an official on the railway; I am Agnes Kennedy'; and, with a friendly little nod, the lady in the white gown flitted through the doorway, and the purdah fell behind her.

## CHAPTER II

### THE KENNEDYS

DINNER was served at a round table decorated with freshly gathered flowers, and lit by wax candles with pretty rose-coloured shades; the appointments were dainty, the menu to correspond, and silent-footed white-clad servants waited to admiration. After his long dusty journey, the stranger

experienced a sensation of well-being and supreme contentment. If *this* were Indian indoor life—how splendid !

He glanced from the trophies on the walls, the Persian rugs spread about the floor, to the diamonds that glittered on the fingers of the ‘Mother of the district,’ finally to a delicate soufflé which was being offered for his approval. As he helped himself he was mentally composing a homé letter, with long and vivid descriptions of India’s unexpected delights. People talked as if it were a mysterious, wild, uncivilized sort of place. Now he intended to impress upon his family that all such talk was absolute *rot* !

Meanwhile his host and hostess had been what is vulgarly termed ‘taking stock’ of their guest : a handsome young fellow, whose dinner suit and well-glazed shirt sat on him with the ease of daily acquaintance. Ignorant and inexperienced with respect to India he might be, but his voice and manners indicated a complete familiarity with cultured life: He was deliberate of speech and a capital listener, but talked in a boyish disjointed fashion of ‘board-ship incidents, the poor grouse prospects at home, the latest musical comedy, and the Eton and Harrow match. Naturally the heads and horns on the walls attracted his admiration, and he listened with rapt attention to Mr. Kennedy’s description of how, when, and where they had fallen to fate.

‘The King of the Bison, I should say !’ exclaimed Trafford, indicating a great trophy. ‘Did you get him near this, sir ?’

‘About four miles away in the Kohur jungle, in the rains—but that was years ago—before the line was opened. These tracts of forest remained untouched ; splendid natural preserves ; but now the sâl jungle has been cleared, and game partly exterminated, thanks to trappers and native shikaris with their cheap guns. Yes, this part of India was the real home of big game, where a man has been known to

bag his brace of tiger before tiffin—but the palmy days of shikar are over !'

' All the same, you still get good sport, Dick, or at least your friends do,' protested Mrs. Kennedy. ' You must not damp Mr. Trafford's hopes, especially as he will be close to a celebrated Reserve.'

Turning to him, she added—

' This part of the world has still a reputation ; you would be astonished at the number of people—actually smart Society people with titles—who come to Dick, clamouring for sport ; we find them tents and shikaris, and put them up for a couple of days. Shooting is our sole attraction—but I must say it 's a big draw ! '

' Have you ever shot a man-eating tiger ? ' asked Trafford, looking over at his host.

' O Lord, yes ! They are common in the district, and take many of the carters and woodmen ; but I will show you the skin of a panther that is said to have eaten a hundred people.'

' I say ! ' exclaimed Trafford ; after a moment's silence, he added, ' I should not have thought a panther would be big enough—or bold enough.'

' He is both—a number of panthers are man-eaters—and ten times more dangerous than tiger. They are devilishly cunning, and hold our race in supreme contempt. They prowl round huts, blowing and sniffing under doors.'

' What cheek ! ' ejaculated his listener.

' Yes, they are only too familiar with mankind, and know his weakness ; rambling through villages at night, they will snatch an old man off his charpoy, a child from a mat, and are gone in a flash. Now the tiger is a gentleman, no spy and sneak ; but the spotted cat is a bounder—in every sense of the word. However, you will soon be as intimate with these wild beasts as I am—a sort of hail-fellow-well-met ! for you are within easy reach of the best beats, and the very cream of shooting.'

Trafford's face beamed ; he leant back in his chair

and smiled like some happy child, whose long promised toy has been placed in his hands at last.

'Oh yes,' said Mr. Kennedy, responding to the smile; 'but, mind you, it's your only asset. Pahari isn't all jam! You have no neighbours, you are off the line, and almost out of humanity's reach.'

'And the reach of temptation,' added Mrs. Kennedy, with her pleasant glance. 'No way to spend money—no cards—no racing.'

'No girls!' broke in her husband. 'Your nearest ladies are Mrs. Castellas and Mrs. Baxter—neither of them either young or attractive.'

'But what about Mrs. Heron?' interposed his wife; 'or is she away?'

'Yes; Chandi doesn't see much of her, except in the cold weather. Old Tom Heron is a long-suffering—the sentence ended in a word that was half-suppressed, but sounded like 'fool.' 'Now come along, Trafford, and have a cigar, and I'll show you the skin of the Holyghur panther.'

'Richard has skins enough to carpet a garden,' declared Mrs. Kennedy. 'When you have had your smoke, you must find your way to the drawing-room and have a little talk with me.'

Here, twenty minutes later, Trafford discovered his hostess, with her lap full of letters.

'It's my mail,' she explained, looking up. 'The English dâk, your train, brought it. I've had quite a budget, including one from my nephew Harry. I think you and he must be of an age; he is twenty.'

'And I was twenty-three last May,' said Trafford, seating himself, and picking up an easy-going dog.

'Are you really? You look so young.'

'It's a way we have in our family. I could not get into the department at twenty as probationer. I've put in two years at Oxford, and a year in France at Nancy.'

'And so you are an Oxford man and twenty-three; and I've been treating you as a boy! I'm afraid

you will find your life very solitary. Now, if you 'd gone to Bengal——'

'Yes, no doubt I 'd be more in the swim ; but I applied for the Central Provinces on account of the big forests and the game.'

'So you had a choice ! You must have got a good diploma ?'

'Middling fair,' he admitted, with rising colour. 'You see I was so deadly keen. I 've not much brains, but I can stick at a thing—some subjects were awfully stiff.'

'Subjects—what sort of subjects ?'

'Well, mathematics, trigonometry, chemistry, elements of zoology, survey, book-keeping. I worried through, and now I 've done with exams for a long time.'

'I had no idea that Woods and Forests were so learned. I thought you only marked trees, and burnt jungle.'

'And I 've not done that yet.'

Mrs. Kennedy felt unusually attracted by this boy's personality, his good-looking tanned face, his honest smiling eyes. How she would have adored a son of her own just like him !

'I am sure your mother nearly broke her heart when you left her, now did she not ?'

'No, not quite,' he answered, with an embarrassed laugh ; 'she knows that nothing ever happens to *me*. Once when I was a kid I fell out of a window, and was only "shaken" ; the mater always wanted me to go to India. She knew I was so keen on it.'

'Did she ?' Mrs. Kennedy leant a little forward and gazed at him interrogatively, as if she expected some further explanation.

'Well—er—you see,' clearing his throat nervously, and stroking the blinking dachshund, 'the fact is, the mater never saw much of *us*. My sister and I were brought up by our grandmother in the country. I was always a frightful pickle ; messing about with

frogs and ferrets, and young rats and slow-worms—just the sort of things the mater screamed at! and I generally had filthy hands, and trod on her dress, or upset the ink—and so, as you may suppose, a little of *me* went a long way. The mater loathes the country—it gives her neuralgia. I was sent to school when I was eight, and spent the “hols” with grannie, and just saw the mater passing through town. She lives in London and travels a good bit; yachts, and goes to Egypt or Norway. She is extraordinarily handsome and popular, and might easily pass for my sister—or my sister’s sister.’

‘Oh, tell me about your sister.’

‘She is younger than I am, and looks a mere chit, but she must be nearly nineteen. We are tremendous pals, as she spent most of her time with grannie, then she went abroad to be finished. I’ve not seen her for two years.’

‘Have you her photograph with you by chance?’

‘I’m afraid it’s in my heavy baggage, but some day I mean to have her out to Pahari—and then you will see her in real life.’

‘Oh, my dear boy! you have not the least idea of what you are talking about,’ protested Mrs. Kennedy, with upraised hands. ‘Wait till you have *seen* Pahari! It is twenty miles from here by a jungle track. You will have no one near you but a few forest guards, and tigers, panthers, and bears; she would not have a soul to speak to—nothing to do—and you absent all the day. Why, she would go crazy from terror and solitude. I wonder if you realize that solitude has a most awful effect on some people? For instance, the former forest officer, your predecessor, young Frost—’ she paused meditatively.

Trafford dislodged the dog, stood up, put his hands in his pockets, and looked down the pretty room with its chintz furniture, and stands of books and flowers. There was quite an appreciable silence. At last he said abruptly—

' And what about young Frost ? '

' Poor fellow, he could not endure it ! He used to come to us as often as possible, and called this place heaven. He talked of forest sounds and mysteries, the strange, weird cries, the ghostly silences. Of course, he had a peculiar temperament—and was naturally nervous. I was sorry for him, and lent him books, and sent him cakes, wrote notes, and tried to let him feel he was within reach of friends.'

' And where is he now ? ' inquired his successor.

' No, no, no ! ' continued the lady, ignoring the question. ' You can't have your sister at Pahari ; you must wait till you are moved.'

' Moved ? I 'm afraid that won't be for some time. Stenhouse said I would be at Pahari for a couple of years.'

' Impossible ! ' cried Mrs. Kennedy, with unexpected heat, ' that would be too, too shameful ! You will be away long before that.'

' I say, Mrs. Kennedy, you *are* in a hurry to be rid of me—and I only arrived at seven o'clock.'

' Oh no ; it will be you who will be dying to see the last of us.'

' Not likely. Do you know that already I feel India in my veins ! ' and he laughed and sniffed. ' Why, I can smell the cork-tree blossoms, and the wet, red earth, as I stand here—delicious ! '

' Listen to the torrents—how it is coming down ! I am sorry you did not postpone your arrival till the rains were over. August is such a bad time in the jungle.'

' That is what they all said ; but I saw no good in slacking about at home. I wanted to make a start.'

' Yes, and that reminds me that we must get to business,' said Mrs. Kennedy briskly. ' I have set up so many boys, so many bachelor establishments. I hear you have brought out very little ? '

' Next to nothing, I 'm sorry to say.'

'What a pity, and you had a large baggage allowance—and things are so much better at home.'

'Yes, and I nearly lived in the Army and Navy Stores for the last week.'

'Do you realize all you will want? Spoons and knives and forks, house-linen, glass and crockery, lamps, oil, soap, stores, and servants.'

As she talked, Mrs. Kennedy seized a book, and with the back of an envelope and a pencil began to scribble at racing speed.

'To-morrow we will post this to Calcutta, and meanwhile I will lend you things to begin with.'

'How more than good of you. I'm really ashamed to sponge on you like this.'

'No, no; I keep a regular lending-out kit. I'll get you a camp cook and a couple of good goats, and I want you to subscribe for books and papers, and to promise me one or two things.'

'Yes—anything you like to name!'

'You are never to sleep in the jungle on account of malaria; always keep quinine in stock, and wear a flannel belt—especially in the rains; also be on the look out for snakes and scorpions—a scorpion in one's bath sponge is a tragedy.'

'I should rather say so!' agreed Trafford with emphasis.

'Last, and not least, if you ever find yourself in any trouble or difficulty, send in, or come to us.'

'Really, Mrs. Kennedy, you are too—too kind. What a lucky thing it was for me that I chanced upon your husband's carriage—it seems like a good omen!'

'Every one helps every one in this country—some day, you will do it yourself.'

'I am sure I hope so. Can you tell me anything of my nearest station?'

'No, I don't know much about the Chandi people beyond Pahari. You see, a great jungle lies between us, and since I had a bad accident, I do not ride—'

though I liked riding beyond words, my nerve is gone, and I am now only able to get about on wheels—but I believe Chandi is a sort of delightful Arcadia, where all agree, all love one another, and lead the simple life. Just what *you* pine for! Such a thing as a pack of cards, or a bottle of champagne, have never been seen in the place. Mr. Baxter, an old missionary and a modern saint, has had an extraordinary influence for good.'

'And what sort of people live in Chandi?'

'Oh, they are few and far between. A doctor, a police officer, a civil engineer, young Scruby—we know him rather well—and a Eurasian family who are struggling with a new discovery—also the head of a large timber contract, Mr. Heron.'

Trafford longed to say, 'And what about Mrs. Heron?' but something stifled the question, and instead he merely said—

'I must get off early to-morrow. I hear the fellow has sent the pony.'

'To-morrow—certainly not! The pony can wait—and eat gram for a change. I have to look out for your servants, and maybe a cow. It really would be folly to start in such a hurry, and we shall be so glad of your company. You and Dick can have some tennis, he wants exercise badly, and he will take you up the line and show you about.'

'No—no, many thanks! Much as you tempt me, Mrs. Kennedy, I really *must* go. I'll scramble along somehow. I will indeed. I've a knack of falling on my feet.'

There was an air of decision about Trafford's mouth and chin that prohibited argument or protest; it was no longer the face of a smiling boy—but that of a resolute young man.

'Scramble along?' she repeated, but at this moment her husband appeared.

'Well, Aggie,' he began, 'still at the soap and candles?'

'No ; but, Dick, Mr. Trafford says he must leave us in the morning.'

'What !' halting as he spoke.

Trafford nodded his head.

'You've been awfully kind, sir, but you see—I—'

'Nonsense, you are not thinking of Pahari for a week.'

'Yes, indeed, I am—I hope to sleep there tomorrow night.'

Mr. Kennedy stared at him ; the young fellow's face expressed unalterable determination (he was known at school as 'an obstinate beggar').

'Then I can only say I am sorry—yes, and unless I am mistaken, I think you will be sorry too,' he added curtly.

'And since you are so stern with yourself, I must go and see about your cart and stores at once,' said Mrs. Kennedy, rising ; 'I will give the orders now' ; and she went out of the room, list in hand.

'It is half-past ten,' announced her husband, looking at a clock ; 'time for travellers to be in bed. I say, Trafford, just come outside into the verandah, and be introduced to the mysterious oriental night—the rain has ceased.'

A full yellow moon was sailing majestically above the tamarind trees, illuminating a landscape of river and distant forest-clad hills. From perfumed bushes in the garden the crickets maintained a ceaseless song ; along the margin of a pool, rose from myriads of sleepless frogs a chorus in praise of the rains ; whilst over the entire scene brooded a sensation of vastness and far-reaching space.

'This is India in a break in the monsoon,' explained the elder man, after an expressive silence. Then laying his hand on Trafford's shoulder, he added, 'Good-night, my boy, and may India be good to you.'

Trafford was not sorry to retire ; his head felt a little dazed by this new life, these new scenes, but it was his mind, not his body, that was exhausted.

' And so this is India at last ! ' he said to himself, as he pulled off his coat, and looked round his quarters.

In the bathroom, the towels, water-cans, and soap were precisely the same as those he found in his mother's luxurious but cramped little house in London. The bed he lay down on had a spring mattress, and lavender-scented sheets. Oh, what *lies* people told about the country !

' India ! India ! India ! ' he murmured, in a drowsy whisper—or was it all a dream ? A horse stamping in his stall, the rumbling of a goods-train rolling by, a pattering of rain—only for a punkah that suddenly began to swing overhead, Trafford could imagine himself still in England.

The following morning, the kindly Kennedys went forth into the compound to speed their parting guest.

The Calcutta bearer, a camp cook, the baggage, some fowls, and a reluctant goat, had previously set out for Pahari in a country cart ; and Trafford, having made a somewhat nervous speech of thanks, and the promise of an early visit, mounted a lean white country-bred, and with a wave of his topee galloped away.

' Wasn't that " Gehazi," Charlie Frost's old pony ? ' asked Mrs. Kennedy. ' I suppose some native bought him for a song, and will sell him for two hundred rupees to the new sahib.'

' No doubt he will,' agreed her husband, who was still gazing after the animal and its rider, as they gradually disappeared amid the high glistening grasses that lined the wet jungle track. ' That is a nice boy, Aggie, a good stamp ! I 'm sorry he would not wait a week or so to feel his way ; but he has a strong will of his own and a fixed determination to do great things at *once*. So there he goes, poor fellow, like the proverbial young bear—with all his troubles before him ! '

Mrs. Kennedy heaved a sigh of assent, her sole response; then she walked back into the bungalow to take the cook's daily account, and order dinner for two.

### CHAPTER III

#### PAHARI

TRAFFORD was a light-weight, there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his frame; and the pony Gehazi, realizing that he was homeward bound, cantered ahead with a lively even pace that spoke of an Arab ancestor whose desert blood rose superior to hard work and scanty fare.

The track lay along the banks of brimming water-courses, across open glades, through patches of tall, wet grass, overtopping and sprinkling the horseman; right and left soared hillsides clothed with dazzling green sâl trees, and delicate bamboo thickets, entangled in orchids and flowering creepers. Not a sound disturbed the silence, save the rustling of leaves as a squirrel ran up a tree, or the far-away cry of a peacock, 'Pee-hawn! Pee-hawn! Pee-hawn!'

Animated by the stimulating consciousness of being for the first time in his life 'his own master,' Trafford rode onward through this strange and vivid country, eye and ear alert to each novel sight and sound, as absolutely happy as it is possible for mortal to be. With youth and hope tingling in his veins, his hand stretched forth to touch a long-desired goal, his cup was not merely full, but actually running over. This incredibly fortunate young man had not a care in the world—beyond a faint doubt as to whether the five rupees he had bestowed on the Kennedys' butler was an adequate 'tip' for that bearded and majestic individual.

Trafford, filled with a sense of rapture, burst into song ; sang, at the top of his pleasant tenor voice, rousing hunting lays and snatches of popular operas—melodies forced from his lips by the sheer joy of living ; and the unaccustomed white pony twitched his thin sensitive ears, whilst the running syce calmly concluded that the young sahib was drunk—already ! His master was indeed intoxicated ; but not with any mortal wine ! Only for the same syce's restraining presence, Trafford would have shouted his joy, his heart-felt homage to the jungle, with its noble trees, delicate orchids, and whispering bamboos—yes, to the beautiful glorious world which was gradually opening before him—a dominion where he would be ruler and lord !

Twenty miles of impenetrable undergrowth, luxuriant glowing glades, and racing nullahs brought the enchanted horseman to the end of his journey. The ragged syce—who had run with unflagging ease—suddenly indicated a melancholy red-tiled bungalow ; it stood near the forest edge, aloof and solitary.

As the future tenant approached, he became aware that it was surrounded by a low verandah, and flanked by a small cook-house and stabling ; these, and the lifeless desolate premises, were swallowed to their threshold in rank weeds.

The new Conservator of Forests hastily dismounted, ran up the steps of his quarters, and pushed open a grimy glass door ; within was emptiness and silence—a silence that was strange, and held in it something sinister ; there was not a soul to be seen, but an overpowering odour of damp and dry rot had taken possession of the premises. The furniture consisted of two or three rickety chairs, a broken-backed cane lounge, and a wooden table, much notched and ink-stained ; the mildewed matting under foot was rotten and in holes, the windows were grey with dirt, and curtained with cobwebs. No, it was not a cheerful apartment ! A bedroom opened on either

hand : the one to the left was empty—save for an old saddle, covered with blue mould ; the adjoining bathroom—festooned with cobwebs and jerry mungles (that hideous, wormy spider peculiar to the East)—was crammed with an extraordinary quantity of empty whisky bottles ; among the dusty débris, a pair of glittering eyes boldly confronted Trafford. They were the malevolent eyes of a monster rat, who, having effected a leisurely inspection, deliberately withdrew.

' I must certainly get a dog ! ' muttered the new arrival, as he made his way to the bedroom on the right. This contained a bare charpoy—stained with some brown stuff ; there was also a punkah, to which a ragged frill still adhered, and in the bathroom, beside the usual half-barrel tub, a tin basin, and a broken lamp.

When he returned from his tour of inspection, he found a toothless old man in a dirty red turban, salaaming violently in the verandah, who addressed him fluently in an unknown tongue—not Hindustani as learned at Oxford—but jungle talk. Trafford shook his head, and the syce came proudly forward in the character of interpreter.

' This old chokedar, he telling never thinking sahib soon soon coming ; not three, four, ten days—all sahibs stay one week or two weeks Kennedy's koti, so he never getting ready, and plenty sorry—no fire—no food—no light—no nothing.'

The syce's outstretched hands were eloquently expressive, and at each dramatic pause, the aged chokedar bowed himself to the ground.

' Well, take the saddle off the pony anyway, and feed it,' commanded the sahib, ' and tell that old man to open all the doors and windows, and get rid of the dust and dirt somehow. I expect the bullock cart will be here in an hour,' he concluded, and walked away to the end of the verandah, which commanded a spacious outlook. No, there was no

comfort to be drawn from the closed door of the cook-house, or the tumble-down stable, towards which the syce was conducting a hopeful pony. A melancholy silence, a desolation that penetrated, seemed to weigh upon the scene, whilst the atmosphere was laden with the taint of rank and decaying vegetation.

Trafford dragged out a chair, sat down, and endeavoured to extract consolation from his pipe ; but his ardour had ebbed. Even his gay enthusiasm and overpowering good spirits were sensibly damped by his surroundings. On one side, and close at hand, lay a rolling and seemingly boundless sea of solemn sombre forests, at present darkened by overhanging clouds. On the other, were far-spreading plains, and a distant range of ragged grey-blue hills ; in the foreground curved a turbulent river, full to the brim of a rapid reddish torrent, the result of good rains.

So this was his billet ! the post for which he had toiled and struggled, fought down indolence, opposition, and temptation.

A fretful little wind now began sighing in the woods, sure harbinger of storm, and something in the dismal sound was in complete harmony with the new forest officer's frame of mind. For two whole hours he remained silent and motionless, an unusual attitude for the active and somewhat restless Trafford ; he was gradually mastering a sharp lesson, and learning the meaning of the cruel word 'Disillusion.' His heart no longer glowed and burned with newly kindled hopes. Sitting alone, far removed from kith or country, Philip Trafford went through a curious process in the mills of time. None, to look at him, would credit the fact, but the sincere actual truth was, that there, in that dilapidated and desolate verandah, he had overstepped the boundary between boyhood and manhood, and aged by some years. The radiant youth who came singing through the

forest asserting the pride of life, was gone for ever and ever !

An unexpected sound of clattering teacups recalled Trafford to the hour and the man, as represented by the venerable chokedar, who, with the aid of an all but naked boy, had made superhuman exertions in the matter of turning out the sitting-room, scaring scorpions, and raising dust. From some mysterious region, a battered kettle and a few old plates and cups had been produced ; but cups, and even hot water, cannot unaided furnish forth a meal. The chokedar, who had cast many anxious glances at the motionless figure of the new-comer (truly he was strange—would he become like Frost Sahib ?), eventually ventured to approach, and salaaming with a fleshless hand, indicated the leisurely approach of the bullock cart.

With this conveyance came an injured and querulous bearer, also a cook and boy, the lively sounds of bleating and cackling, and an immediate change for the better ! Thanks to the marvellous aptitude of Indian servants, the bungalow in a slap-dash hasty fashion was put to rights. Mrs. Kennedy's camp cook took command of the situation, and things, as Americans say, ' began to hum.'

In a surprisingly short time, behold a fire in the kitchen, and a fowl roasting before it, boxes were carried in and unpacked, and a table set for dinner.

The bedroom was overhauled, the charpoy made up with sheets and pillows, and when Trafford entered he actually laughed aloud—a harsh, strange laugh that seemed to find an unnatural echo at the other end of the bungalow. There on the bed were the clothes he had worn the previous night, white shirt, black tie, silk socks and pumps complete ; all laid out with the most scrupulous exactitude.

' Why ! ' he exclaimed, looking at the bearer, ' you don't suppose I am going to dress here ? Put them away ! '

It was all very fine to say ‘Put them away,’ but where was the place to contain them? He realized this fact as he glanced round, and meeting the man’s eye the bearer spoke; salaaming with both hands he said—

‘ Sahib—please—I go.’

‘ What do you say?’

‘ True—I telling—this too much jungly place—too much fever getting. Pahari plenty bad bungalow—no luck here.’

‘ Well,’ surveying him with lofty scorn, ‘ you are a nice specimen, I will say! Where do I come in after paying your way down and advancing you a month’s pay—twenty rupees?’

‘ Please, sahib, I poor man, I die here. Go-downs bad—too much jungle!’ Then after a pause he drew himself up, looked Trafford squarely in the face, and added, ‘ Also I speak only true word—too much *devil*!’

‘ Too much humbug—too much lies!’ retorted Trafford sternly.

‘ Protector of the Poor—I go back—and then send one good Moffussil bearer—very strong—my own brother.’ (The usual tale!)

‘ Well, anyhow, you must hold on till your brother comes,’ said Trafford wearily, ‘ and then if you must depart, I suppose you must.’

Having thus terminated the interview he went to dinner, and partook of roast fowl—a badly-smoked, venerable bird—also the inevitable anchovy toast, by the light of candles stuck in empty whisky bottles.

The rain had now recommenced, and descended noisily in solid sheets, pouring, splashing, soaking, whilst flickering lightning darted across the pitch black outer darkness beyond the radius of the guttering candles, and Trafford became sensible of a strange feeling of dissatisfaction and depression, an actual and unaccountable hatred of Pahari.

How different to the enchanting memories of last evening!—the dainty drawing-room with its water-colours, new books, real English arm-chairs, and aroma of home and refinement. The gracious hostess with her kind dark eyes, the little crowd of sociable dogs, the whole sensation of warmth, kindred spirits, and pleasant company! It soon became impossible to remain in the verandah, owing to its miserably exposed situation, and Trafford was reluctantly compelled to retire to bed; anything was better than the dank and musty sitting-room! In bed he lay awake for what seemed an interminable time, tossing and turning, and vainly endeavouring to compose himself to sleep. Here, there was nothing to mark the passage of the leaden-footed hours; no clock, no bells, no traffic; but strangely enough it seemed to him that once or twice he had heard a faint, husky voice calling, ‘Qui hi! peg lao!’

Do as he would, count sheep, or practise other warranted allurements to Morpheus, he could not rest; gradually, oh very gradually, he seemed to approach the edge of mysteries for which there was no explanation, and became aware of a strange and unnatural fear, of an attitude of enforced listening, an expectancy of something horrible in his vicinity. Fear was a novel sensation; hitherto Trafford’s nerves (child and boy) had been of cast-iron; now, and for the first time, he was conscious of an actual deadly terror. His forehead felt damp, his heart beat in hurried thumps—heart and brain seemed to have passed completely out of his control, a diabolical force was laying a firm hold upon both. The already dark room appeared to be invaded by a thick impenetrable density, a solid ebony blackness, that was superhuman, and charged with—yes, horror!

As he lay, all his wits on edge, his pulse involuntarily hammering, listening to the swish of the rain, and the regular drops on the broad teak leaves, these seemed to mutter in a monotonous rhythm—

' And you too ! And you too ! '

How angrily Trafford battled and argued with his sensations ; how he despised these absurd fancies, these foolish fears and palpitations. He sat erect in bed, nursing his knees, peering into the room, assuring himself he was an idiot ; that a long day, and little to eat, had given him nightmare, and oh, how he would laugh at himself in the morning ! He resolved to light a candle, and search the premises ; but as he put out his hand he knocked down the matches and heard the contents of the box scattering over the floor. At the same time, he became aware of a curiously stealthy movement in the bathroom. Was it imagination, or rats ? Stoutly and fiercely he combated his terror, still sitting erect with straining eyes, striving to penetrate the strange and solid gloom.

Solitude at night in lonely places frequently succeeds in raising a sense of the elemental in our composition ; this sense now held Trafford in its vice-like grip. He might call himself an ass and an idiot, but an irrepressible inward voice urged that he was on the borders of a vast grim forest, imprisoned by a diabolical darkness and tropical rain —*alone* with some awful, though invisible presence. He started violently—what was that sound of a staggering, halting step coming through the bathroom doorway ? Imagination and rats, again replied Reason. No ; the thing, whatever it was, was now actually in the room ; choking, gasping, and endeavouring to articulate—what ? Trafford felt an uncomfortable rising of the skin ; his whole being was invaded by the conviction of an unearthly, unseen, acutely felt horror. He struggled desperately to regain the mastery over himself, and exerting all his powers of self-control sprang out of bed, groped for matches, and with a trembling hand lit the candle. After all, there was nothing to be seen ; but a thick, unnatural darkness, charged with malignant intention,

encompassed him on all sides, and was obviously closing upon him ! He was certain that if he remained another second where he was, he would lose his reason, and fled into the back verandah as one possessed, shouting, ‘ Bearer ! Bearer ! Bearer ! I say, Bearer ! ’ but there was no reply ; the servants’ quarters were as silent as so many tombs ; the sole answer he received was conveyed by the steady drumming of raindrops, and a metallic patter on the rough teak leaves, which said—

‘ And you too ! And you too ! ’

Trafford made a frantic dash at his bed, and snatched at the counterpane ; in this he rolled himself and spent the remainder of the night in a chair in the verandah. Here, it was certainly wet, but there was at least air and sanity, a sense of escape, a sundering of bonds, a recovery of freedom.

With the dawn the downpour ceased, and the first flickering of pale green light along the horizon was the signal for the notes of birds, the crowing of jungle cocks, the stirring of unseen animals in the forest. Then Trafford, completely worn out in mind and body, crept back to his deserted charpoy, and fell into a profound slumber ; he slept like the proverbial log until the sun was blazing through the grimy windows, and a sonorous voice in the doorway called out—

‘ Sahib ! Sahib ! Sahib ! ’

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GOSLING

BROAD daylight and a flood of tropical sunshine have a wonderfully cheering effect. When Trafford opened his eyes on a new world he found that his environment had assumed a different com-

plexion, the powers of darkness were no longer abroad. As he tubbed and dressed, he assured himself, with angry vehemence, that his last night's experience was simply the result of the poisonous atmosphere from a malarious jungle, semi-starvation, and imagination. The mental voice was loud and arbitrary, as it urged a purely physical reason and microbes of unknown venom for his recent extraordinary breakdown. And here came the cook ! a clean, brisk-looking person, carrying a large cup of tea, and a substantial supply of buttered toast. Matters were improving ! thought Trafford, as he fell upon the toast, with an appetite that had not been appeased for four-and-twenty hours, and he bore with unexpected fortitude the intelligence that Abdul bearer had taken leave and departed with the bullock cart (and twenty rupees wages) at dawn.

The cook, who volunteered to step into his cast-off shoes, proved himself a treasure of price. He was a Central Province man from Raipore, well accustomed to camp life, and extraordinarily resourceful in extremities ; with a few eggs, some ghee, a bottle of Worcester sauce, and a pair of fowls, he could conjure up a well-served dinner with a miraculous variety of courses.

Presently several forest guards appeared upon the scene, and later a portly Eurasian in a painfully tight green coat entered with many bows, and presented himself as 'Mr. Beaufort,' subordinate official, who declared he was 'flabbergasted' to find that the new Conservator had already arrived.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' he began in a deep, oily voice, 'I am most awfully sorry, never anticipating your honour so soon, or arl would have been in readiness. New-comers arlways take leave preceding residence, and stay at Mr. Kennedy's until they can take bird's-eye view.'

'Oh yes, I know,' assented Trafford ; 'but I was anxious to come on at once, for I hear this district

wants looking after uncommonly badly. Will you send them to cut away the grass round the bungalow, mend the roof of the stable, and whitewash the rooms? The place as it is, is not fit for a dog to live in. I suppose you can find me a tent meanwhile ? '

Mr. Beaufort was secretly impressed, and not a little startled by the new officer's air of authority. He was overawed by his steady, searching eye, his good looks—yes, and his good clothes! Here was, no doubt, a clever, smart, busy sort of young chap, but it would not last! Oh no, it would not last; the Pahari jungle would soon suck up his strength and his wits, as it had done to others. Meanwhile, he answered with unctuous *empressement*.

' Arl right ; yess, sir, you may rely on me to do everything that is possible, and at once—yess—and I hope to give your honour every satisfaction.'

Trafford nodded ; he was tasting the fruits of office for the first time, and the flavour was not disagreeable.

' If I had anticipated your honour would arrive so promptlee,' continued Beaufort, ' arl would have been in readiness ; but please to excuse me, for arlways the official coming to Pahari—unless to shoot—' gesticulating with both hands, ' procrastinates arrival as long as—as—as commensurate with duty.'

' Yes, yes,' assented the new Conservator, with a touch of impatience, ' I am here, as you see ; and now I must have a room I can sit in, an office table, and prepare to receive the forest guards' reports—so the sooner you begin the better.'

Mr. Beaufort bowed acquiescence ; he felt himself dismissed. Evidently this rather stern young official was of different metal to Frost, who always deferred business to the eleventh hour, and shuffled most of its details into the hands of his delighted subordinates. The Eurasian realized that, at any rate for the present, his reign was ended ; practically he had been the assistant Conservator for a long and

lucrative period. He now scampered down the steps of the verandah with (considering his dimensions) astonishing celerity, and proceeded to deliver to a number of natives, wearing brass badges, a long and excited harangue.

In an hour's time a crowd of coolies had assembled ; they appeared as quietly and mysteriously as if they had sprung out of the earth or forest, and set to work cutting jungle, turning out the bungalow, burning the ant-eaten matting, and toiling with ceaseless industry—under the voluble directions of the man in the green coat.

Meanwhile Trafford, like the dove in the ark, found no rest for the sole of his foot, and at four o'clock ordered the white pony, in order that he might ride forth, and explore. He followed the course of a well-worn 'cutcha' road, right into the heart of the forest—the pony struck into it at once, as if it were an old acquaintance. This track, as it advanced, became less defined, and more and more lonely ; and Trafford instinctively felt himself an alien and a trespasser among these dense and mighty woods. The perpetual green twilight, the thickness, the brooding mystery of the all-pervading silent jungle, oppressed his senses. Here and there he caught the gleam of a solitary pool, the fresh tracks of deer crossed his path, the snapping of a twig, the swish of a wet branch, or the leering countenance of a black-faced monkey, reminded him that he was not altogether alone. A little idle breeze made the tall bamboos creak uneasily, and stirred the heavy leaves of the wild plantains ; it seemed to the stranger, accustomed to open English country with its hedges and highways, that this sombre forest and unbroken solitude, this peculiar stillness, was suggestive of prowling creatures lurking in creeping shadows, watching his progress with invisible eyes ; and the hot, steamy atmosphere of the woods seemed to enervate and oppress him.

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In an hour's time a crowd of coolies had assembled ; they appeared as quietly and mysteriously as if they had sprung out of the earth or forest, and set to work cutting jungle, turning out the bungalow, burning the ant-eaten matting, and toiling with ceaseless industry—under the voluble directions of the man in the green coat.

Meanwhile Trafford, like the dove in the ark, found no rest for the sole of his foot, and at four o'clock ordered the white pony, in order that he might ride forth, and explore. He followed the course of a well-worn 'cutcha' road, right into the heart of the forest—the pony struck into it at once, as if it were an old acquaintance. This track, as it advanced, became less defined, and more and more lonely ; and Trafford instinctively felt himself an alien and a trespasser among these dense and mighty woods. The perpetual green twilight, the thickness, the brooding mystery of the all-pervading silent jungle, oppressed his senses. Here and there he caught the gleam of a solitary pool, the fresh tracks of deer crossed his path, the snapping of a twig, the swish of a wet branch, or the leering countenance of a black-faced monkey, reminded him that he was not altogether alone. A little idle breeze made the tall bamboos creak uneasily, and stirred the heavy leaves of the wild plantains ; it seemed to the stranger, accustomed to open English country with its hedges and highways, that this sombre forest and unbroken solitude, this peculiar stillness, was suggestive of prowling creatures lurking in creeping shadows, watching his progress with invisible eyes ; and the hot, steamy atmosphere of the woods seemed to enervate and oppress him.

Terrified by night, and nervous by day, what possessed him? he asked himself. Was he going off his chump? If so, the sooner he went quietly home, and was put away in Earlswood, the better. No, no; he must not give way to rotten fancies bred of scanty food and sleep, but take a pull at himself, and, come what would, be strong and self-reliant. Having made this valiant resolution, he screwed up his mouth, and began to whistle 'The Soldiers' March' from 'Faust.'

Trafford had soon grasped the fact that the white pony was no stranger to this forest road, so leaving the reins on his neck, amidst a sea of jungle, bamboo, and giant creepers, he looked about him with the keenly critical eye of an expert: and yet more thoroughly than on the previous day did he realize that he was actually and truly in the so-called 'gorgeous East.' Yes, most objects were highly coloured; for instance, birds, butterflies, and luxuriant vegetation. The blaze of flowering trees, shrubs, and climbing plants surpassed even *his* expectations, and he recognized the real presentation of different flora that were hitherto mere illustrations—and a name. For example, two elegant Angans *Hardwickia binata*, handsome jungle giants linked together by chains of large blue convolvuli; a 'Shisham,' almost clothed in rose-pink orchids; a prickly 'Babul' covered with blossoms; and deep in a thick undergrowth of orange-tinted plants, great bushes of 'Patas' displayed masses of magnificent flame-coloured blooms. Brilliant butterflies and birds flew and flitted hither and thither; a superb peacock and his attendant harem trailed majestically across the track a few yards ahead of Gehazi. Undoubtedly there was ample food for the eye in this vast Rodore Reserve, and also for the ear; flocks of noisy green parrots and well-to-do pigeons occasionally flashed overhead, whilst insolent black-faced monkeys chattered vivaciously, and

tossed nuts at the intruder, as they leaped from branch to branch.

Once Trafford was arrested by a strange cry. Was it a deer? He pulled up and listened, gazing steadily into the dark perspective of the forest. The cry was not repeated, but suddenly to the right there was a violent commotion in the undergrowth, a sound of smashing, crashing, and squelching in the wet, red earth, and a frantic tossing of boughs. Presently there emerged an enormous pair of horns, a grey-blue hide, and in another moment a huge bull buffalo plunged out of the jungle and stood in the track fifty yards ahead of Trafford, who felt Gehazi start, and tremble violently between his knees.

The monster's attention was engaged in the opposite direction, and luckily he did not wind them; Trafford knew from books on sport, that of all animals, none is more vindictive and dangerous (especially when wounded) than the wild buffalo—the subject of many tales of ferocity and unprovoked attack. He was well aware that, in case of need, his only chance lay in instant flight; but the great bull, unconscious of an anxious observer, lumbered up the grassy ride, his horns sweeping his flanks, his huge hoofs sucking at the mire, as he paced hastily onward—and presently thundered away at a heavy canter.

Trafford's heart beat rapidly. Here was his first sight of big game, and what big game! What a head! As well as he could judge, almost as fine as the splendid trophy secured by Mr. Kennedy. He followed the great prize at a discreet distance, no longer filled with a distrust of his surroundings, but a heart aflame with all a sportsman's ardour; his whole mind concentrated on the subject of native trackers, his new guns, and those magnificent horns.

The road, which was winding, made many bends. Round one of these the explorer beheld approaching

rose garden, tennis ground, chesterfield sofas, and pink lampshades, eh ?'

'No, not quite such a silly ass as all that ! You must remember that I am barely forty-eight hours in India—but I confess I *did* look for a house that was clean, and had been inhabited—not a musty, unhealthy ruin, choked in dirt and jungle ; not a fire lit, not a window open, no furniture to speak of. I doubt if I can offer you a second plate.'

'That old chokedar takes ganja ; he should get the boot ; and Beaufort is a gabbling rascal. *He* knew you were expected—report him ! Be strict, or you will never call your soul your own. Slackers have a poor time in the district.'

Aware of a challenge in Trafford's eye, he added—

'I know you are not one of that sort—nor am I—but if you don't keep a tight hand your lot will play the fool ; it's their little game, and they are used to it.'

'Thank you. I know you are right. I mean to work, and try my level best to get good work out of others. I don't think any one will play the fool with me twice.'

'Oh no, they will merely pay you out, and burn the forest ! For the price of one single tandsticker match they can destroy miles of country, thousands of game, and thousands of trees. I gather that you are tremendously keen and interested in your billet ?'

'Immensely in forestry and woodcraft—yes—and India itself. I say, what a country ! So ancient, religious, and mysterious.'

Scruby stared in stupefied amazement. Was this new-comer a literary chap by any chance ? If so—what a sell !

'I've always,' resumed Trafford, 'been what you call tremendously keen about animals, and trees, and that sort of thing.'

'Then you will get along all right with Collins,

our doctor, who swears that trees have souls, and a cabbage its own point of view.'

'Oh, that's bosh! He must have a slate off,' scoffed Trafford.

'It's bosh, as you say, but the doctor, though eccentric, is as sane as they make 'em.'

'I'm glad to hear it, as I suppose if I go sick he'll doctor me. And what about your own work?' he inquired.

'To be quite candid, in me you behold no enthusiast. I am not in the department for any sentimental reason; merely for my daily bread—savings—and pension. As long as my roads are not washed away and my bridges don't buckle, *I* am satisfied.'

Trafford nodded, although this declaration was entirely opposed to his own ideas; he had ambition, and a mind to do great things.

'Pahari is lonely,' continued his companion. 'We are a small crowd at Chandi, and have such an innocent and spotless reputation, that outsiders call us "The Babes in the Wood." India is great on nicknames. This district is a bit scattered, but you are beyond the boundary—twelve miles off—and quite out in the cold—rather I should say—the heat! But I expect when you are settled, with decent servants, some sound furniture, and a couple of smart ponies, you'll be all right. You are in the thick of the best shooting, you know. By the way, I see you are riding Frost's old crock, Gehazi. Good name, eh? Poor Frost himself—he was a sort of social leper. The pony looks a bit down on his luck, but he only wants gram; he is a ripping good animal, and takes some riding. There is a legend that he once ran second for the Civil Service Cup.'

'Did he really? He now belongs to one of the woodmen,' said Trafford. 'He asks four hundred rupees for him; it seems a bit stiff.'

'Great Scott! it's robbery! Give him a hundred

and he will thank you on his bended knees. I know a capital pony the Malgoozar of a village owns, that would suit you down to the ground.'

'Thank you—I'd like to see him, and if you could put me on to a dog, I'd be glad.'

'The Kennedys are the great dog folk, but I'll see. I have a good few myself—fox-terriers—woolly dogs are no good out here. I can give you a nice young panther, absolutely tame—indeed, I may say most pathetically affectionate.'

'It's awfully good of you, but I'll not deprive you of the panther. You see, *I've* been brought up with cats.'

'I reared her on the bottle as a kitten, and she really is a good sort; but the fact is, I've a pet bear and a baby tiger, and they want a lot of attention.'

'You don't mean to say you keep a menagerie?'

'Yes, and it's not a travelling one to pay its way.'

'Well, I have no doubt it's extraordinarily interesting, but if you can introduce me to more domestic animals, such as a dog and a pony, I'll be grateful.'

Scruby threw back his head, laughed, and said he would see what he could do.

As they rode through the forest, Trafford did not fail to describe his glimpse of the great bull buffalo.

'Oh, by George!' cried Scruby, with a face of apprehension, 'it's a good thing, and you may bless your lucky stars he did not wind you! That is the celebrated monster that haunts this part of the forest. They call him "the wounded buff," and say that he is always looking for the man that shot him, naturally to have his life. But jokes apart, at certain times of the year amateur shikaris come out here with ice and champagne, and all the latest things in kit, and bag nothing, but wound lots of game. It's a most cruel business; these wretched animals spend the rest of their existence more or less in agony, roaming miserably about the forests, all enjoyment of life at

an end, and the amateurs with spring mattresses, washstands, and luxuries, baulked of real trophies, buy them second-hand, and make the fortunes of the horn merchants.'

'Horn merchants? What are they?'

'The fellows who trap animals or even poison them, and have a wonderful market for heads; these sportsmen take them home and brag of their wonderful bags.'

'I say, how sickening!' exclaimed his listener.

'Yes, isn't it? The last degree of mean money-grabbing and vanity. But about this 'ere buffalo—don't you be fool-hardy. Believe me—buffs are always dangerous brutes, and one of the few animals that will deliberately and pertinaciously track a man down and kill him—never ceasing—never resting—sort of thing, you know. In the rainy season they are in their glory. Lord! how they do love to wallow in the pools; and this is the time they have frightful fights among themselves. Other wild beasts may run from you, the buff does not—he charges instead. It is not so long ago since a sportsman was killed in this very forest. He wounded a buff, who turned suddenly, chased him to a tree which the unfortunate man had not time to climb—he dodged madly from side to side, but was soon caught, and terribly gored. He is buried over in our little cemetery. So however you may joke with tiger, be serious with buffaloes. This particular buff will have some one yet, and get back his own. They say the bullet he has in him is a ceaseless reminder and irritation; and if I were to see him a mile off, I'd ride for my life!'

As the two young men jogged onwards sociably, they discoursed of the merits of guns and ponies, of dogs and cricket, discovered that they had several mutual acquaintances, and that Scruby's younger brother and Trafford had been in the same house at Harrow. Time flew with such amazing rapidity,

that when at last the riders emerged into an open space where stood the forest bungalow, the sun was sinking in the fiery west, throwing the dark form of Pahari into bold relief against a sulphur and flame-coloured sky.

Apparently the khansamah and forest folk had worked wonders ; the long grass had been cut, and several venomous snakes destroyed ; all the verandah doors were clean and open, a pungent herb had been burnt within, the roof of the stable was in hand, and there was a business-like bustle about the cook-house.

'Hullo !' exclaimed Trafford, 'they are getting on ; the place looks different already. I just wish you'd seen it yesterday.'

'Very glad I did not !' rejoined Scruby. 'There was no occasion for you to see it either. You should never run your head against a stone wall, but respect the customs of the country. The custom of this country is, to take a breather at Karwassa.'

'Rather rough on the Kennedys, don't you think ?'

'No, I don't—I believe they were sent by a kind Providence to rule this district, and be the refuge of the desolate and destitute.' Then in a graver voice he added, 'Of course, you don't know, but years ago they had two nice kids of their own—boys. Within a week they both died of fever. This happened in the time when the Kennedys had no spare coin, and could not afford to go to the hills. The trouble almost broke their hearts.' Since then, they are all for "other people's boys," and it is impossible to tell you what they have done for homeless bachelors, married people, stray girls, and the native poor. She is an angel without wings, and he is one of the best. They are the parents, confidants, money-lenders, inn-keepers, and peace-makers of these parts. I say,' jumping off his pony, 'there is the chap that owns Gehazi. I'll go and buy him for you now—no time like the present !'

## CHAPTER V

## GUIDE AND COUNSELLOR AND FRIEND

AS the host faced his welcome guest across the table in the verandah, and dispatched some excellent mulligatawny and fresh river fish, he found it difficult to realize that he was in the identical place he had come to the previous afternoon. Fragrant flowers adorned the board, with a mathematical pattern of jungle leaves arranged precisely around them, on a tablecloth marked 'R. and A. Kennedy'; moreover, there was a promising and substantial cake, also a box of Trichy cheroots—presents which had been discovered as the cart was unpacked.

To-night the moon shone with all the effulgence of midday, and Trafford's spirits rose. After all, his expectations might be fulfilled! Why not? A good dinner, cheerful company, and a glorious Eastern night, have a stimulating effect. When the table had been carried indoors, and chairs set forward, the two young men lit their cheroots and began to talk. Naturally, their first topic was rifles—as with girls it is frocks.

'I say, what sort of shooting iron have you brought?' inquired Scruby.

'A medium bore cordite for one, four hundred hammerless top snap action.'

'Good! I see you mean business. I'd like to have a look at it.'

'So you shall. Come along inside, and we'll unpack them. I've a couple more.'

The empty room at the end was filled with baggage and half-opened boxes; ammunition, books, and clothes were scattered about in all directions. As the cases were opened, an odour of Rangoon oil liberated, and the treasures displayed, Scruby exclaimed enviously—

' Well, you are a lucky beggar! I 've only an Express; and Express rifles, good in their way, are out of date. Your governor has done the thing handsomely: he must have paid a nice little sum for this battery of yours.'

' My governor died when I was a kid. This battery was a present to myself. You see,' and he hesitated, ' I 've—I 've some money of my own.'

' Once again—I repeat—lucky beggar!' said Scruby; ' a fellow with such guns, all the very newest pattern,' he was examining a weapon at the time, ' and with a little money of his own, is a *rara avis* in these parts.'

As he raised a rook-rifle to his shoulder, his eye was caught by a large and arresting photograph in an elaborate silver frame. It stood precariously on the window-ledge, amid a collection of collars, handkerchiefs, and pipes.

' Oh, I say ! ' he exclaimed involuntarily.

' I know,' said Trafford, ' my things are in a sickening muddle. I 've no place to put anything, and I had to get out papers and clean clothes. Yes,' reaching over, ' that 's a picture of my mater.'

' What ! ' putting down the rifle and taking up the photograph, ' you 're humbugging—your mater! Nonsense ! '

The photograph represented the head and beautiful bare shoulders of a handsome woman of thirty, with perfect clean-cut features, a nobly set-on head, the dark hair crowned by a tall spiked tiara. Scruby's remarkably keen grey eyes contemplated the portrait with profound content—but his vision was blinded to the fact that he was gazing upon a triumphantly hard and heartless face.

' And once more I say, lucky beggar ! ' he remarked as he restored the treasure to his companion's outstretched hand; ' you haven't any more of them—have you ? '

' Yes, there 's my sister—she is somewhere about,

but you might as well look for a needle in a bundle of hay. Let us go outside again, the oil and the dry rot are getting a bit thick !'

When Scruby had settled himself in a chair, and slowly proceeded to light a cheroot, he resumed—

' You 'll have lots of work for two ponies,' he remarked ; ' this is a very big district—as you know.'

' Yes, so I understand, and the bigger the better as far as I 'm concerned.'

' Ah, so you think now ! The reserve forest is thirty-eight miles across.'

' And full of game,' supplemented Trafford as he struck a match.

' Middling ; game is getting scarce, especially bison. This is the best time for tracking, but they are shy and on the move to the hills. Oh, sport is not what it was ten years ago.'

' Mr. Kennedy said something of the sort—but why ? '

' For several reasons, my son. One is the increase of wild dogs, who have scattered masses of game all over the district.'

' Wild dogs—I 've read of them, savage, hungry, red fellows that hunt in packs. I can understand them clearing out deer all right—but tiger, bison, buffalo—no ! '

' But yes. The wind of these pests, who, like Mazeppa's wolves, " can tire the hounds' deep hate and hunters' ire," is enough ; the game scent them as if by magic, and every creature disappears—even the tiger. When they are mad with hunger they will attack *anything*—tiger or bison—and devour the dead bodies of their fallen brethren. If you were to see a pack of these brutes in full cry after some wretched sambur, it is a sight you would never forget. Next to the wild dogs come the horn-hunters, native trappers, snarers, shooters ; day in and day out they are working in the jungle, killing game of all ages and sizes. These heads, horns, and

skins they sell to a taxidermist, who provides ammunition, and gives a certain price. They get the rupees down—say, fifty for a tiger, ten for a panther, twenty for a bison's head. It is a paying business, I can tell you !'

'I say, what a shame ! No wonder game is scarce !'

'Yes, it 's a splendid job for Haman. He sets up the heads and skins, and sells them as "trophies" at enormous profits to travellers, who go home with their heads and false *tails* of great sport. (See the pun ?) I believe Haman has an active agent somewhere in this part of the world. I 've been trying to find him out—but it 's no go. Anyway, the game goes on, and the game is thinning.'

'But can nothing be done ?' demanded Trafford impatiently.

'Yes ; and what is more, *you* are the man to do it.'

Trafford swung round in his chair to face his companion, but he did not speak.

'There has been a lot of slackness about here : wood made away with, any quantity of thieving, and as to poaching—Lord bless you, why, the forest guards are the worst !'

'The forest guards !' echoed the new official.

'Yes ; all the villages near the edge of the "Bandi," that 's the reserve forest, have their own pet shikaris, and these are well supplied with ammunition and cheap guns. I tell you, Trafford, this forest reserve is poached to death—and see you to it !'

'You bet I will !' he cried, jumping to his feet with energy. 'I say, you *have* let me behind the scenes !'

'Sit down—sit down—be calm,' urged Scruby, with a waving hand ; 'don't excite yourself. Keep a close mouth, and trust no one—yet. Keep a sharp eye on your guns and ammunition ; that cordite rifle would be a noble prize. I suppose you are a pretty fair shot ?'

'Only middling,' was the modest answer. 'I've shot grouse and pheasants without actually peppering the beaters. The biggest four-legged animal I've yet bagged was a hare. I know nothing about big game shooting—except from books.'

'Oh, books are bosh!' declared Scruby, with lofty scorn; 'the book of Nature is the thing—here it lies open before your eyes.'

'Well, any further information thankfully received.'

'All right,' said Scruby, hitching back his chair and putting his feet on the railings of the verandah; 'but first of all I'll give you some useful information about your neighbours—shall I?'

'I did not know I had any,' returned Trafford; 'but go ahead—full steam.'

'Society is not overcrowded, as you may suppose; and we cannot afford to be *very* select at Chandi—a pretty little station a mile beyond me. It's our metropolis, but as the Frenchman said at the fox-hunt, "There is no band, no promenade, no nothing!" We have a bazaar—where you can purchase stale Europe stores, huka heads, glass bangles, cotton goods, and sweets. Then we have also a tank, a temple, a little tin church; but our great glory is a railway station on a branch line six miles off. It's chiefly used for timber, skins, and cotton, but a passenger train runs up and down once a day. Think of that! and actually does its seven miles an hour!'

'All right, I'm thinking hard. And what about the people?'

'Well, there is Chapman, a police officer, who lives in Chandi and comes and goes; a travelling padré, a wonderful chap to shoot and cycle; he combines slaying tiger and shepherding his flock—a scattered flock too. He has killed a man-eater, and the natives love him. I only wish we saw more of him. Then there is Baxter the missionary, and his wife; he

is a splendid old boy, just now gone home to have an operation on his eyes.'

'But you are telling me of the people who are *not* there,' protested Trafford.

'Now please don't hustle me, and you shall hear of those who *are*. Collins, our doctor, a bit of a bear, generally gruff and growling when you are well; when you are ill, as tender and affectionate as an old nurse. He has a weakness for cats—white Persian cats—and is a tremendous bookworm. He does not care for the sex; the only woman he lets inside his doors—and has a good word for—is Jane Austen! He is full of sayings and quotations, and really is clever, and deadly keen about books and plays. I shouldn't wonder if he wrote on the quiet! He enjoys bridge—that is to say, when he has a good partner. He has a most awful temper when he is put out, so be cautious how you tread on his toes! Then there is my boss, Maguire—Irish—with the finest moustache in the C.P., and vain as a peacock. He has a most melodious brogue, but bedad, he has all his wits about him, and thoroughly understands the job of getting a lot of work out of his subordinates,—whilst *he* looks on! These are the officials; except the great Deputy Commissioner—who comes on tour. As for the unofficial: there's Tom Heron, who runs a big wood contract, and is our financial card, and a rich man. Mrs. Heron is handsome, hospitable, and indolent. She has a sultry temper too, and they say when her servants put her out, she—well—no matter. There is a whisper that she has a past—and was—who knows—a *divorcée*; but even if it were true, no one minds. In India, Society has a short memory!'

'Is that all?'

'By no means. There are the Castellas. Castellas is a Eurasian, a paper-backed, kind-hearted visionary, full of schemes—rattling good schemes too—that he cannot bring off. He is a dark, sanguine, easy-

going sort of beggar, like an Italian, but he says he's half Scotch—Mrs. Heron declares that his clan live in the lowest slums of Calcutta bazaar—who went "home," as he calls it, to study and take his degree as a doctor—his clan paid up;—the people out here are wonderfully generous to their relatives. "Medicine" was to be his career, but he met his career in the shape of Mrs. Hampton, a pretty widow who patronized the same boarding-house. She had only one child and a nice fortune—all in her own hands. Castellas was strikingly good-looking in those days—the dark romantic princely style—so she married him, and they came out to India full of magnificent plans and schemes; unfortunately the schemes have swallowed up all her money. Being weak and enthusiastic, poor Otto was robbed right and left. He has tried jute, sugar, tea—even a butter farm in the Neilgherries. The Castellas came here three years ago, and this venture is positively their last stand—the last dyke.'

'And what is the last venture?'

'You'll laugh when I tell you; no less than a perfume manufactory! Castellas knows something of chemistry, and runs a sort of diggings in the forest, where he has a retort and distils an essence from certain flowers,—the blossoms of the babul; the particular process is a dead, dead secret. He once gave me a presentation bottle—and ugh! cabbage-water wasn't in it!'

'Then, of course, it has no sale?'

'No, unless in bazaars. Natives rather enjoy peculiar odours—but I don't think Castellas has got the hang of the thing yet,—and I must confess I'm awfully sorry for Joan Hampton.'

'Who is the lady?'

'Mrs. Castellas' daughter; she came out a couple of years ago. It's hard lines on her. Her father's people are gentlefolk; she looks well-born. Here she is a lady help, supporting a tottering house and

trying to keep things together, with a helpless mother, a moonstruck step-father, and a dark sister of somewhat limited intelligence.'

'And is that the lot ?'

'No ; I must not forget—last, but not least, the great Gresham, who dropped into the station three years ago—and has hung round ever since !'

'Hung round !' repeated Trafford. 'What do you mean ?'

'I'll try and explain ; but Gresham himself would be more eloquent, and no doubt give you a practical illustration of the definition of "hanging round." However, one sober fact remains. *I—moi qui vous parle*'—tapping his chest, 'introduced Gresham to Chandi ! I happened on him by chance, when waiting at the Dâk bungalow at Dongar railway station. The old khansamah came to me, with a face as long as his beard, and said, "There is a sahib here—a second-hand sahib" (he meant second-class) "who has no money, and cannot speak the language. He says he has been robbed. Myself, I believe he speaks lies ; and I therefore must put him forth. Already he owes the Sirkar three rupees, and desires greatly to speak with your Excellency." Well, I went into a room and found the individual, a gentleman in appearance and manner ; clothes a little soiled and shabby. He looked actually hungry, and pinched, yes, and scared. I expect he had realized that it is no joke to be at a loose end out here. Then he told me his story ; he was in an awful hole, and new to the country. Two days before, his servant had robbed him—got out of the mail train at night at some intermediate station, and gone off with all his belongings ; portmanteaux, money, guns, letters, and left him nothing but the clothes he stood up in, a couple of pillows, and a sponge bag ! He had not even a rupee to pay for a wire, much less the Dâk bungalow charges, and could not speak a word of the language. Would I help him ? Naturally, I

said I would. I settled his bill, wired to the police, and took him home with me—and he has remained in Chandi ever since.'

' What—three years ! ' exclaimed Trafford, in a tone of incredulity ; ' you are not serious ? Though I did hear on board ship that quite a lot of social wreckage is cast up in Indian jungles.'

' Wreckage ! I wish Gresham was listening to you ! Wait till you see him. He is magnificent ! The thief was never traced—he had two days good start. Of course we did what we could to fit out the poor victim, and gave him the run of our wardrobes. The Doctor set him up in boots ; and Maguire—who is a masher—and I supplied the rest.'

' Pending supplies from home, I presume ? '

' Well, you see—he took an immense fancy to us all.'

' Oh, did he ? You don't say so—how flattering ! '

' Yes, and to the little station,—and was not disposed to move on.'

' But—'

' Yes, I admit it 's a curious case. He told me in confidence that he had a most awful row with his people ; that he was once in the army, and went a bit too fast ; then a trustee plundered him, so he had to look out for some appointment. A friend in Simla found him a good post as companion to a Rajah—a sort of billet for which he felt particularly qualified ; but just after he arrived, he had a wire to Bombay to say the Rajah was already suited—and his influential friend was dangerously ill. He died—and Gresham was, so to speak, left ! Then he made up his mind for a trip to Australia to try his fortune in Melbourne, and was on his way to Ceylon to catch the mail boat when he was robbed of every blessed thing he had—and there he was ! '

' I see—on your hands,' said Trafford drily.

' Well, as a matter of fact, he only spent three months with me, and then he went the round. He

plays a good game of billiards and bridge ; can act, and ride, and talk ; isn't bad looking. The Herons took to him, and, figuratively, his future fortune was made ! Mrs. H. and he became tremendous pals. Then when the Deputy Commissioner and wife were in camp, she introduced Gresham, and they liked him immensely—especially Mrs. Deputy Commissioner. Oh, I tell you, Gresham knows his way about ! And the upshot was, that he got the post of bottle-washer to the Rajah of Jambore—our one and only potentate. We are near his territory ; he lives about fifteen miles out. The Rajah is a youngish man, and has a sort of veneer of education, and a taste for horses and champagne. Gresham looks after the stables, writes his letters, and amuses His Highness. He has a bungalow he calls a " go-down," a couple of hundred rupees a month, and the use of the Rajah's ponies.'

' So he has fallen on his feet ? '

' Yes ; he loves Chandi, and proposes to live and die here, and he really rules our station. He is a capital organizer, and has a nice, cheery, bluffing sort of manner ; is secretary to the club, runs our sports and dances, manages our theatricals,—a first-class actor in the Hawtrey style,—and does the civil to any big wigs who may happen to come to the Dâk bungalow. When he can, he runs up to Calcutta or Lucknow for the races, and that is all there is to tell about Gresham.'

' And do you mean to say that this chap you found penniless and starving, and of whom you know absolutely nothing, actually bosses the Rajah and the station ? ' demanded Trafford magisterially.

' Yes ; it 's a true bill, my lord ! '

' Then now I think I understand *why* you are all called " The Babes in the Wood. " '

' Oh, it 's all very fine to be sarcastic, and superior, but you will soon be a Babe yourself,' said Scruby sharply. .

'At any rate there is no doubt that, whatever his past career, Mr. Gresham has met with success here ; he must be uncommonly clever.'

'He is, by Jove, much too clever for some ! and now I 'll conclude my remarks with a few useful tips.'

'All right—go ahead.'

'As regards natives—a pair of clean hands, that 's of course ; good birth, too, is useful—breeding counts for more than brains with the people out here. An air of consequence and importance is also essential—this sort of thing, you see.'

Scruby rose with languid deliberation, carefully settled his collar, stuck a rupee in his eye (for eyeglass), and then proceeded to stalk up and down the verandah, with measured tread, and an air of impressive dignity. As he paced by, he scrutinized his companion with an expression of compassionate condescension, and Trafford, as he lay back in his chair watching him, indulged in his first really hearty laugh in India.

'Remember,' continued Scruby, in an authoritative tone, 'that Orientals do not think it worth while to respect one who does not respect himself. That is your tip for *them*.'

Trafford nodded gravely. Why should Scruby suppose that he was lacking in self-respect ? Still, the recollection of last night's humbling cowardice weighed heavily on his memory.

'Don't believe a single word Beaufort says,' resumed Scruby. 'Don't lend money to Castellas. Don't buy a pony from Gresham ; and as for Mrs. Heron—it is all the word *Don't* ! We are not a bad little station ; we have our occasional teapot storms and squabbles, but we have also our sport : our cricket, tennis, and billiard matches, and hockey. People come in from the district in the cold weather. I 'm sorry you are so far out.'

'Yes, it 's a bit lonelier than I expected. I suppose

Frost got the hump, and that was why he cleared.  
When did he go ? '

Scruby took his cheroot out of his mouth, and stared ; then he answered—

' Er—about six months ago—just at the beginning of the hot weather.'

' And where was he moved to ? '

' Moved to ! ' repeated Scruby ; ' I—don't understand,—didn't you know ? ' and his eyes suddenly strayed to the newly cut compound, and a solitary gold mohur tree.

Trafford's gaze followed the same direction. Yes, a mound ! A mound of unmistakable import, hitherto concealed in long grass.

' Oh ! ' exclaimed Trafford, and his face fell. He was sensible of a jar, a shock, and for several moments he was silent. ' So he died here, did he ? ' he observed at last, his gaze abstractedly fixed on the bats, who were wheeling and circling with whirring wings.

' Yes. I see they did not mention it ; and of course it 's not exactly an encouraging introduction to a new post. He lies there—but he certainly would have been moved out of the service in double-quick time.'

' Why so ? '

' This is a lonely station, and Frost had no self-control, no resources. Another chap would have started collecting bugs or skins or stamps—learning the banjo, or writing a play ; but Charlie had no inside tastes ; he smoked and soaked and brooded. The whisky fiend got hold of him, and he was never out of debt and scrapes. His bills for stores—that is to say, liquor—were a caution—a bottle of whisky a day. He let his subordinates do the work. His hand was so shaky he could scarcely write his name ; he was so nervous he dared not ride Gehazi. By the way, I bought him for you for eighty rupees. No, no ; *don't* thank me, the bargaining was a pleasure ! Underlings shot and

stole and took bribes, and played the mischief. Then he had a bad go of "D.T." and swore that this place was full of blackness and devils. I spent a couple of awful nights with him, and I tell you I won't forget it in a hurry.'

'And was nothing known at headquarters?' asked Trafford, after a considerable pause.

'Not for some time; the jungle has certain manifest advantages, and of course the Kennedys helped to shield him. However, by and by things leaked out. Some one was playing hanky panky with Government revenue and Government timber. Kos by kos and inch by inch the business was tracked to this very bungalow.'

Trafford turned his head, and looked at the speaker steadily.

'A letter from Stenhouse, showing Frost that everything was burst up, summoned him to Calcutta. So, after drinking himself crazy, he went and cut his throat in the bathroom, and—that was his end.'

'Was it?—how awful!' exclaimed Trafford. 'Do you know, I had an impression last night that something of that sort had happened here.'

'Oh, bosh! This bungalow is as good in that way as any. There have been lots of suicides, especially in the forest, and every old bungalow can tell some tale. Certainly the Mutiny bungalows I do bar; but here, it's nothing. In isolated spots, men's minds grow a bit crooked from living alone. The great thing is, to be up and doing, and on the move. Now look at *me!*' said Scruby, who had been pacing the verandah, hands in pockets.

Trafford did as requested. He beheld a slightly built, fair-headed young man with clean-shaven face, a pair of remarkably keen eyes, and a firm, well-cut mouth.

'I get along first rate. I take in heaps of papers, magazines, novels. I can lend you stacks. I garden, I photograph. I have pet wild animals—also

cows, poultry, and a pack of dogs. I did not bring them along to-day, as they run a chance of being nipped in the forest. Take a leaf out of my book, and keep busy ; it 's only in the beginning it pinches—when we young fellows are sent out into the wilderness to find ourselves ! '

' Well, I 'll do my little best,' agreed Trafford ; ' anyway, I 'm keen on my job.'

' That 's the main thing. I must confess I rather wonder Stenhouse sent you here. You must have had a rattling good " chit " from home, for as the district is now, it wants a strong man with a sense of his responsibility ; and you look a mere lad ! '

' I suppose I ought to feel flattered, but Stenhouse's reception certainly did not convey that impression. On the contrary, I think he had his knife into me because, having been at Harrow and Oxford, he thought I might " fancy " myself, and had better get to know my place. My place will be Pahari—for two years.'

' Good Lord ! what have you been doing already ? '

' Nothing, as far as I know ; perhaps it was my manner, or because I asked him if he could put me on to a decent bearer ; and he glared, and told me to go to—Cook ! I suppose he thought it beastly cheek.'

' I expect he had been dining out, and got hold of the wrong champagne. He is not a bad sort ; and considered just. I say, how this verandah brings things back ! Frost's old Bombay chair, with the greasy mark of his head—and the place he always sat in facing the river. I can see him now—shaky, and silent, and staring, with a pipe in his mouth, and a stiff peg beside him. It was " Qui hi—peg lao ! " all day and all night. Well, in a totally different tone, ' suppose we go out and sit on the steps in the moonlight, and swop shooting yarns ? '

' I 've none to swop, as you may suppose,' said Trafford, ' but I am only too keen to listen to any amount of your adventures.'

For the next half-hour, Trafford sat enthralled by moving tales of the pursuit and death of sambur, tiger, bison, and bear. His attention was so close, so unquestioned and sincere, that Eliot Scruby's interest in the new chum increased into a very solid liking—the unconscious Trafford had made a lifelong friend! It appeared that this yellow-headed Scruby had actually shot eleven tiger and three bull bison with his old second-hand Express rifle; and so the two young men remained talking and listening, till the setting of the moon and the stillness of the surrounding world warned them to seek their beds.

## CHAPTER VI

## CHANDI

IT was with a halting, half-hearted air that Trafford pressed the one and only bed and bedroom upon his guest. Scruby did not believe in 'things,' and were he to assure him that the spirit of true hospitality lay in the direction of the open verandah and the cane couch, he would have been rudely incredulous. Finally, it was arranged to toss for the charpoy, and to the host's inexpressible relief the outside quarters fell to him. Here he slept speedily and soundly in the chair, with a pillow and rug. But it was otherwise with Scruby, who, in a gaudy borrowed sleeping-suit, was prepared to enjoy a good night's rest, but after a short interval awoke bewildered to find his heart thumping violently, his face streaming with perspiration, and why? His eyes raked the gloom: there was nothing alarming to be seen or felt—merely a disagreeable odour of dry-rot. Yes, there *was*! the sensation of something wrong and unusual; undoubtedly a mysterious force, a menacing presence was lurking in the room.

Strange, sinister, and half-forgotten tales connected with this very bungalow now surged into his mind. For instance, the legend that ages ago Pahari was built on the site of a temple dedicated to secret and bloody rites, inclusive of human sacrifices, and that the demon or entity still haunted the neighbourhood of his obliterated altar, famishing for offerings. This, of course, was rot.

Yet what was the story that Carvill, a level-headed, hard-bitten chap, told of a horrible devilish darkness and paralysing fear. He declared that if he were bound to live at Pahari, there was only one of two things to do—shoot himself—or run home!

Presently Scruby became aware of a hurried breathing close to him—or was it Trafford? Trafford's healthy, long-drawn suspirations came from the verandah, where the door stood wide—one was natural, was the other super-natural?

Nevertheless, though his blood ran cold, he generously refrained from shouting to his host, but rose; and lit a candle with tremulous haste: there was nothing whatever to be seen! He walked into the verandah and looked out. All was silent in a warm throbbing darkness; even the shrilling insects were at rest. The beautiful moon of the rains had sunk behind the horizon, and a complete hush descended on this, the deathly hour between sunset and dawn. Scruby returned to what was truly a dark room; here was a darkness that could be felt, a blackness almost corporeal! but controlling his fears by an enormous effort of will, he hunted for a book—and in vain. Eventually, he was compelled to content himself with an old Scotch newspaper; but even a steady reading of the Perth sheep and wool sales failed in effect. He was wide awake and alert, till a certain bright star arose and glimmered in the eastern horizon; behold Lucifer, Son of the Morning! Then Scruby blew out the candle—and fell asleep.

By twelve o'clock the new Forest Officer had taken his bearings, and in a fashion set his house in order—thanks to the active assistance and fluent tongue of his companion, and together they started through the great Rodore Reserve for Chandi. Trafford enjoyed this ride; to-day the aspect of the forest seemed different, and full of delightful surprises.

Scruby, who had assumed the rôle of mentor and showman, would interrupt a vivid description of cricket or polo, to indicate some object worthy of note: a rare bird, a sapling frayed and red from the recent rubbing of stags' antlers, the call of a barking deer from the cool depths of a thicket of bamboos, or the clumps of ground orchids, wild lilies, and maiden-hair.

'I must get you that chestnut pony,' he remarked, 'while you fatten up Gehazi. I dare say you could do with two more.'

'Well, perhaps I might.'

'You know, you will be often riding over to see me, and that is a job for one—a motor would be handy if there was only a road.'

'I shall be only too glad to look you up. You have been a real good Samaritan. I must confess, till you came over, I felt like an owl in the desert—a pelican alone upon the house-top!'

'You and I will be pals, Trafford. You see, you are nearer my age than the others. Maguire and the doctor are right good fellows, but over forty—and we have not exactly the same point of view.'

'And you may suppose that I, who am a stranger in the land, will be only too thankful for a chum, and will get away as often as I can. Pahari is a dreary hole.'

'It is—but you must buck up, and come in often. Gehazi knows the Chandi road well.'

'Gehazi! I say, what a name! It sounds almost profane.'

'Isn't he as white as snow? We are great on

nicknames out here : the Kennedys are Uncle Dick and Aunt Aggie ; Maguire is the Jabberwock ; and I 'm the Gosling ! '

' The Gosling ! ' repeated Trafford; staring ; ' why ? '

' Oh, I 'm no fool, as I hope you have already realized ; but some stupid ass discovered the likeness —my yellow head, sharp beak, long neck, and a good deal of cackle. I 'll be the Gosling when I haven't a hair or a tooth left. However, it amuses them, and does me no harm.'

' I wonder how I shall be labelled ? '

Scruby turned in his saddle, and surveyed him deliberately.

' I see nothing remarkable—nothing to catch the eye, as yet.'

His gaze continued to rest on his companion, who was now looking straight ahead. Trafford was an extraordinarily good-looking fellow, with a strong face and a Ten Commandments sort of expression. He must be unusually clever and efficient to be posted to such a difficult district ; but when Scruby recalled the gloomy, dilapidated bungalow, the rotting boards, the dank, tall jungle, the bedroom, he did not envy his new friend his billet !

' I 'll get you a decent bearer—my old chap's son,' he said suddenly. ' He will look after you ; and I 'll give you a dog, a really well-bred pup. You must keep a dâk coolie for your letters—and—and—if I were you, I think—I 'd move your bed to the other end of the bungalow.'

Trafford glanced at him sharply.

' Well—er—you see, it 's more open,' he explained rather lamely.

' Yes, I dare say it is. I must get hold of some furniture—but where ? '

' Kampti or Jubbulpore is your nearest ; but I 'll lend you a few sticks to go on with.'

' Thank you. I say, what a country for lending ! '

' And borrowing,' added Scruby with a laugh.

' I 've had the very salt and mustard carried off from under my nose—the servants do it—every one for his own master ! '

As they talked, they were riding up a gradual slope, and suddenly emerged from the dim, damp forest upon a broad majestic highway, lined with nim trees, and presenting an animated and noisy scene. Here were long long lines of creaking bullock carts, the drivers incognito, their brown blankets drawn over their heads, strings of pack bullocks laden with rice and grain, ekkas packed to the roof, and not a few family parties on the move on foot, carrying their bundles and cooking pots—for even the natives of India have caught the contagious fever of this age—restlessness.

' The Grand Trunk Road,' announced Scruby, with a comprehensive wave of his hand ; ' a great feature —these trees you see now and then, with a squat little image or a stone daubed red, and decorated with coloured rags, are sacred, and the rags an offering to propitiate the gods, and ensure a safe journey—especially through the forest.'

Trafford gazed on a rag-coloured tree with astonished eyes and grave interest ; it was his first introduction to heathendom.

' How extraordinary ! ' he exclaimed, ' and this the twentieth century. I suppose these people believe there 's something in it ? '

' They do, and with all their jim-jams they are a thousand times more what is called " religious " than we are ! It 's an all-week business with them. I say, shall we shove on a bit ?—I 'm starving ; but I know that Solomon—my head man—has mulligatawny and a fat duck for tiffin—last night's dinner, you see ! '

Half an hour's brisk trotting brought the riders to a thick bamboo clump through which peered the red-tiled roof of a bungalow ; it stood a little aloof from the highway, with two entrances, gate piers

(Central Province fashion) without gates. It was a bright, cheerful-looking abode, with snow-white steps and a pillared verandah—from which instantly charged four barking dogs, and a parrot in a cage screamed, ‘ Qui hi ! Qui hi ! Oh, shut up ! ’

By one side of the steps—chained and drowsy—basked a sleek young panther, who surveyed them steadily with cruel half-closed eyes, and at a little distance in the compound a spotted deer was tethered. To the right lay a cook-house and stables ; outside of these, a stout and very hot black pony was being vigorously rubbed down. To the left lay a garden filled with roses, vegetables, and patches of luscious lucerne, and the entire establishment wore a bustling, gay, well-cared for appearance that appealed to Trafford on the spot. Two syces now came running to meet their master, who exclaimed as he dismounted—

‘ Hullo, I say ! I see Gresham is here ; that is his pony. I would not be surprised if he has polished off our tiffin.’

Escorted by four dogs and an insidious mongoose, the hungry pair entered the sitting-room, where at the head of the table an individual, with a newspaper propped against a decanter, was seated at lunch.

As he threw down the screen he revealed a broad-shouldered, well-set-up man of about five-and-thirty, with close-cropped dark hair, a square forehead, black brows, a well-formed nose, and very square jaw ; the mouth was concealed by a trim moustache. Mr. Gresham was dressed in neat riding kit, and a heavy whip lay beside him on the table. When he raised his head and stared at Trafford with a pair of bold, tyrannous blue eyes, that young man was instantly conscious of dislike at first sight.

‘ Hullo, Gos ! ’ he exclaimed, in a full hearty voice. ‘ So you are back ! See,’ indicating the carcase of a duck, and a table strewn with cigar ends and empty soda-water bottles, ‘ I did not wait for you. I was

ravenous ! I must say your chap is a treasure. Lord, what a lime soufflé !'

' Glad you liked it, but I think you might have left us some of the duck,' protested Scruby, in an injured tone.

' My dear fellow, I did not expect you ; anyway, I believe there 's cold hump. This,' with a casual nod at Trafford, ' I presume, is the new fellow in place of poor Charlie Frost ? '

' Yes — Trafford — this is Gresham — Gresham — Trafford,' announced Scruby in a grumpy voice ; undoubtedly the disappointment respecting the duck still rankled.

' Ah, pleased to welcome you,' said Gresham, extending a hand with the air of the master of the house, and looking him over in a leisurely way. ' Only just come, I suppose ? '

It occurred to Trafford that his manner was distinctly lofty.

' Yes, three days ago.'

' And so you have got the Pahari district, eh ? It 's a rotten billet. I am the Agent and Secretary of the Rajah of Jambore, and have a good deal to do with his woods, so I expect we shall meet officially. I often drop in here on Scruby and the little station.'

' So I hear,' said Trafford stiffly. The magnificent patronage of Gresham, especially when he spoke of himself as ' the Rajah's Secretary,' riled the newcomer.

As Scruby had departed to pillage the larder, the invited guest drew up a chair, and seated himself ; he was struck by the tidiness, order, and air of homely comfort about his present quarters : the heads, horns, and sporting prints on the walls ; bamboo bookcases crammed with books, the large writing-table with ample elbow-room, and deep and roomy arm-chairs—just the sort to cast oneself into after a long day's work !

' Yes,' exclaimed Gresham, interpreting his

thoughts ; ‘ the Gosling knows how to do himself well ! Good cook, good ponies, and bungalow complete in every particular. It only wants the *lady* ! Though, perhaps, there ’s a little too much of the Zoo about the place to suit a nervous young woman.’

‘ The Zoo ! ’ echoed Scruby, who now entered, followed by a khitmagar carrying a tray. ‘ Well, I don’t mind,’ sitting down, and helping his guest to beer. ‘ The Zoo is a popular institution, and,’ significantly, ‘ well patronized. Anyway, it ’s better than the Reptile-house, eh ? ’

‘ Oh, if you are going to talk scandal,’ protested Gresham, rising, ‘ I ’m off ’ ; and he took up his whip. ‘ I just want to look in on the doctor. I ’ll take your brown pony. See you again, Gos. Good-bye, Trafford. Glad to have met you ; you must come out some day to Jambore, and I ’ll show you my pet Rajah. I suppose you are going back to-night.’

‘ No, indeed,’ replied Scruby, speaking hastily with his mouth full ; ‘ he is stopping here for a couple of days.’

‘ Yes ? ’ halting in the doorway ; ‘ and where are you going to put him ? ’

‘ Why, in the spare room—where else ? ’

Gresham’s face assumed a fixed expression.

‘ But, my dear fellow, I ’ve brought over my kit —where do I come in ? ’ he demanded aggressively.

‘ I ’m rather afraid that for once, Gresham, old boy, you ’ll have to do the other thing—and go out,’ replied Scruby in a cheery voice. ‘ The Castellas or the doctor will give you a shakedown.’

‘ Oh ! ’ ejaculated the would-be guest ; then, after a moment’s hesitation, he added briskly, ‘ Well, all right ; but I ’ll come back to dinner. I ’d like to cultivate our new friend.’

He threw a quick glance at Trafford, as he walked off, and was presently heard shouting to the syces in authoritative Hindustani.

‘ He did not like it one little bit ! ’ remarked Scruby

later on, as he and his companion went into the verandah to smoke, and they caught sight of a figure galloping away on a fine brown pony. ‘ You see, Gresham has come to look on this house as his own exclusive property. He is a rum beggar—extraordinarily clever in his way. There is a queer sort of magnetism about him, and he gets every single blessed thing he wants ; has everything done for him, and never puts himself out one quarter of an inch ; in fact, he rules this place.’

‘ But why ? For the life of me, I cannot understand,’ said Trafford, who had not taken to the gentleman.

‘ Well, he is under the impression that he discovered us—much as if we were a desert island ! To give him his due, he has woke up the station, taught us new tricks, and introduced civilizátion. He declares that he has the priceless gift of amusing others, and that we could not exist without him ! ’

‘ And only for this billet with the Rajah—he would still be living round—or would he go home ? ’

‘ Ask me another ! He is a riddle, and as clever as he can stick ; capital at games and dances, a sound adviser about ladies’ frocks, and a fine judge of a horse—don’t let him sell you one—plays bridge like a book, and has a wonderful head for drink—wo bottles of champagne might be so much spring water.’

‘ But,’ argued Trafford, ‘ Mrs. Kennedy said this place was Arcadia or Eden—without Eve or the Serpent—cards and champagne absolutely unknown.’

‘ Ah ! Uncle Dick has not been here for some years. We are changed, and have our beautiful Eve and our wily Serpent—I name no names ! Gresham has a good deal to say to our revolution, though in church he is a pattern, and when the padré is away for weeks and weeks, always reads the services and lessons in a fine sonorous voice ; when big-wigs camp around, I tell you he has the manners of a number one aide-de-camp.’

' Oh ! so then you *like* him ? ' said Trafford rather shortly.

' Well, I don't know—I'm not afraid of him anyhow,' declared Scruby, stretching his arms over his head and stifling a yawn, ' though better be his friend than his enemy ! '

' But isn't he the fellow you found shabby and famished in a Dâk bungalow, without a single rupee to his name ? '

' That's a true bill ; and there he is now, the Rajah's right hand—the big boss of this little station—which he is at present turning out for inspection, on my best pony ! Come along ; your coolie and baggage have arrived. I'll show you the spare room. You can have a tub, and when you are ready I'll take you round my premises.'

Later on, Scruby formally introduced his dogs, Tom, Dick, and Fanny.

' Harry was taken by a panther. I'll give you one of Fanny's pups, and you must call him Henry. The dogs are pure English bred—but they run to leg, and have a different sort of bark out here.'

After this he proudly exhibited his heads and skins ; his butterflies, garden and stables, Ella his pet panther, and Barli his pet bear.

' I rather bar shooting bears,' he announced, ' they cry so, and sing a horrible sort of requiem that haunts one. I shot her mother two years ago, and this little cub was on her back—no bigger than a small cat. I brought the poor furious orphan home, and here she is, as you see—and eats out of your hand.'

Barli, an amiable lady, mopped and mowed from side to side and offered a clumsy paw. She had a snow-white frill, and a most beautiful parting all the way down her back, as neat and straight as if it had been divided by a comb.

' She is awfully tame, and so friendly with dogs and every one, and *loves* cake.'

' Don't you give her meat ? ' asked Trafford.

'No. Where is your natural history? The old girl is a vegetarian, and she has her rice and milk—two seers morning and evening. We are obliged to keep her fastened up in the daytime, as otherwise she scrimmages about and makes hay in the house; but she is loose at night, and never roams far. Do you see those scratches on her lovely face?'

'I do; been in the wars with cats?'

'No; a panther that was going to carry off a dog—her special friend—and she gave him what for!'

Before dinner, the young men strolled into Chandi to the little Club, a neat thatched bungalow with deep verandahs, surrounded by tennis and badminton courts.

'Of course you must become a member,' said Scruby; 'I'll put you up,' and he led the way into the building.

The smoking-room was empty; in the billiard-room, two pallid youths were knocking the balls about.

'They are a couple of Heron's clerks,' explained Scruby. 'We are not exactly the Carlton, nor too exclusive—and these poor beggars want a little amusement. I expect the upper ten are all in the card-room,' he added, pulling back a purdah. It disclosed four enthusiasts playing bridge, who looked up and nodded at Scruby. The quartette included Gresham and three others.

'The man opposite is the doctor,' Scruby whispered; 'the grey-headed chap in shirt-sleeves is Heron; and the dummy is Maguire. We won't disturb them—they hate spectators—and so we will clear out.'

Gresham appeared at dinner, radiant with good-humour.

'Ha! a winner I see!' exclaimed his host.

'Yes, a few rupees only. I took them off the doctor—he was out of luck, and went on weak No Trumpers.'

' Sometimes they come off,' remarked Trafford.

' You play of course ? ' glancing at him eagerly.

' Not much—and not well.'

' Oh, we will soon take you in hand ! You know there 's nothing to do in the jungle but shoot, drink, and play cards.'

' Speak for yourself, Gresham ! ' objected Scruby.

' Yes, we all know you 're a model—a plaster saint. Thank the Lord, I 'm not ! Trafford, I 'm afraid you will be indeed a lost babe starving in the wood at Pahari, but there is a nice little empty bungalow in the station that you might take—and I 'll show you the ropes.'

' I wish I could—but I must live where I am posted.'

' And what a hole it is ! I used to go there now and then to cheer up poor old Frost ; and he always swore there was something in the house urging him to cut his throat.'

' Oh, shut up, Gresham ! ' interposed Scruby, with a touch of temper. ' Let us talk of something else —every one knows Frost had D.T.'

Gresham accordingly changed his attitude of teacher, patron and counsellor, and proceeded to put several pertinent questions to Trafford in a hearty, good-natured fashion. He soon discovered what part of the world he came from, where he had been to school, his father's regiment, and arrived at the conclusion that this smooth-faced, grave-eyed youth was no green boy—nor one to carry his heart on his sleeve. His speech was deliberate, and his gaze steady. It was extraordinary what a talent Gresham displayed for finding out all about other people's affairs—even the most trivial details—and this from a man so severely reticent regarding himself ! In fact, he kept curiosity at bay with a manner that was almost intimidating. He was a Londoner, he had been in the Service, but the rascality of his trustees had ruined him. He liked India, it was just a bit of all right, and here ended the history of Ivor Gresham.

He soon realized that Trafford, who was not a young man after his own heart (smoked a pipe, drank beer, talked but little), was by no means the usual impecunious fellow, come out to live on, and save his pay, wear Cawnpore boots, jharun coats, and ride cheap 'tats.' Here was a plutocrat, who got his clothes in Savile Row, his guns at Purdeys', travelled first class by P. & O., talked of three or four ponies, and must naturally be cultivated and conciliated ; so he abandoned his superior attitude of 'you 're not a bad little unfledged chicken,' for that of hand in hand *camaraderie* and close brotherly fellowship.

When Scruby was called out of the room on business—just as the plantains and custard apples were placed on the table—Gresham hitched his chair closer to the new-comer, and said in a confidential tone—

' Now, that 's a rare good chap ! an old head on young shoulders,' and he laughed, and poured more whisky into his glass. ' I suppose he went to look you up ? '

' Yes, he did.'

' Always prompt ! and has reported on all of us, eh ? ' (This query was accompanied by a suspicious alertness of eye.) ' To-morrow, he will lug you round the station, and introduce you to our smart set.'

' I shall be very glad to know them ; but I 've no end of work to do, and must get back.'

' Well, don't overdo it. Hard labour doesn't pay in jungly billets, and there 's a lot of malaria about Pahari. Scruby's nearest neighbours are the Castellas—did he say anything of them ? '

' Something—not much,' was the cautious reply.

' They are nearly broke, I 'm afraid. No money sense in the family—I don't know what will be the end—always on the wild-goose chase.'

' They, however, have settled here ? '

' Yes ; he has a miserable little business—a scent distillery. I don't suppose he makes what pays the

bread man ! They live in a tumble-down old place, and Miss Hampton, the "Europe" daughter, has a fine job to keep a roof over their heads. That is a wonderful girl, full of go and pluck. I admire her ; though it 's not, I 'm sorry to say, mutual. The old woman, who has been a beauty in the milk and roses style, will soon nail you for sympathy for her fallen estate, and tell you all about her carriage, her cook, her debts, and her spasms. Between her extravagance and his crazy schemes, the Castellas have let quite a large fortune slip through their fingers, and *now* it 's the deluge ! ' As he concluded he pushed back his chair, rose to his feet, and proceeded to pace the room.

' Can't people help them a little ? ' suggested Trafford.

' They do. I get my Rajah to buy the poisonous odour, the Gosling sends game and vegetables, Mrs. Heron lends a hand with frocks. Oh, there are good Samaritans in Chandi, I tell you ! '

Gresham had the ready qualities of a man of the world, and talked to the new-comer with tact, discrimination, and facility. After ten minutes' desultory conversation, Scruby reappeared, and he said—

' Oh, here is the Gosling again ! I say, Gos, let 's get out the bridge table, and have a game of "Cut Throat." '

' All right,' he agreed ; ' mind you, you must not rook Trafford. He says he is not a strong player—so we will only say eight annas.'

' Oh, my dear fellow,' expostulated Gresham, ' I never play less than a rupee a hundred.'

' All right, I am agreeable,' said Trafford ; ' a rupee is not breaking ' ; and the three sat down and cut for partners. Gresham drew dummy. He soon proved himself an admirable performer ; so steady, so absolutely sure of himself ; with an unerring memory and a definite scheme, trick after trick fell

into his ready hands, and at twelve o'clock, when Scruby declared for bed, Trafford found himself scribbling an I.O.U. for thirty rupees to the credit of Ivor Gresham.

## CHAPTER VII

### VISITING ROUNDS

IN the cool of the next afternoon, the two companions rode together into Chandi ; the air was moist, and the remains of the last downpour dripped heavily off the glistening trees ; far away on either side of the highway stretched waving crops of luxuriant jowari (or millet), dotted with dark topes of mango.

Chandi, once a cantonment of importance, was situated on a plateau : the bungalows were at one end, the bazaar and temple at the other ; and between them—dividing, as it were, the two races—lay a holy tank.

' We will shoot a card on the Club first,' suggested Scruby, ' and then draw old Collins. He is sure to be "darwaza bund," but you may as well do the civil ; it was always a terrible grievance that Frost had never called on him.'

The Medical Officer's thatched quarters, which stood well away from the road, boasted a pot garden, and was coloured a vivid pink ; with its long bamboo blinds, it resembled a modest woman who had lowered her green veil.

The sound of ponies' hoofs reached an individual in the verandah, who was buried in a book, and a long chair ; and a deep, harsh voice was instantly heard to bellow—

' Qui hi ! Qui hi ! Darwaza bund ! '

' Told you so,' said Scruby, with a grin. ' He is sitting inside, in the cool of his pyjamas, nursing a

cat, and can see us through the chick—though we can't see him.'

Presently a servant appeared, echoed 'Darwaza bund,' offered a blue dinner-plate for their cards, and with a salaam vanished.

'Now for the lady!' said Scruby. 'Old Gehazi knows his way there *well*, and has had many a lump of sugar.'

The Herons' bungalow, a vestige of Chandi's better days, was large, imposing, two-storeyed, and stood in a great compound surrounded by a thick 'milk' hedge. The red-tiled porch embowered in flowering creepers was hung with caged birds; two dirzees at work in the verandah squatted like a pair of Buddhas, all the chicks were down, and silence brooded over the entire premises.

At the summons of 'Qui hi!' a bearer advanced hastily tying his coat as he came, offered a silver salver, and announced—

'Darwaza bund—mem sahib bimar' (sick).

'I say, what a let off!' cried Scruby, instantly turning his pony.

'Yes, calling loses its terrors in Chandi,' agreed his companion, with a laugh.

'That's a rare bit of luck! We can get back soon and have a game of tennis,' added his friend; but as he spoke they were overtaken by a flying figure holding on to its turban, who panted out—

'Mem sahib—salaam deti.'

'Oh, hang!' muttered Scruby. 'Trafford, she has seen your card—now she wants to see *you*. You may as well get it over. She's rather at a loose end at present'; and he quoted, 'There are no men to govern in this wood!'

The visitors were ushered along a matted passage, lined with English prints, into a spacious dim drawing-room, with tall, draped windows opening on the verandah. A stamped cotton Oriental dado—representing gods and goddesses, hunting and capture—

ran round the walls ; there were rugs, palms, a-pillowed divan, also a grand piano, couches and chairs covered in yellow brocade, a pile of French novels, a perfume of some strange scent, and also of cigarettes ; but few flowers or pictures. It was a room with a personality ; redolent of luxury, a certain amount of bizarre taste, a touch of Eastern sensuousness, and over and above, something indescribable and intangible. No, it was not an apartment that took you in its arms, so to speak, and made you love it on the spot !

' She 's dressing,' announced Scruby gruffly, taking up a paper as he spoke, and subsiding into a ' Europe ' arm-chair ; and, indeed, there was ample time for leisurely inspection. Trafford examined the pictures, the weird scenes on the dado, and even surveyed the deep verandah with its gorgeous flowering plants, inviting chairs, tasselled hammock, and be-ribboned guitar. Nearly fifteen minutes elapsed before the hostess appeared, and then she glided in ere the visitors were aware of her presence. A tall, slight lady, with low-growing black hair, a pallid complexion, beautifully pencilled brows, a pair of marvellously black eyes, and oh, what slumbering fires were veiled by their sweeping lashes !

She wore a wonderful tea-gown of a shimmering peacock shade, flecked with gold ; it hung gracefully about her sinuous form, and round her neck was a chain of rough uncut emeralds—a unique and truly barbaric ornament.

' So very pleased to see a new face, Mr. Trafford,' she said, extending a small hand, and speaking in a low rich voice. ' How good of you to come and call so soon ! '

This lady had a talking eye, and Trafford stood momentarily dumb, feeling like a complete fool. The spell of surprise is potent ; in a little jungle station, such an apparition of beauty and grace was so totally unexpected, that he found himself speechless.

'He is only doing his calls!' put in Scruby brusquely.

'Oh yes—his duty—' suggested the lady, with malicious suavity.

'And—pleasure—' stammered Trafford, actually blushing as he spoke.

'So then you are fond of visiting?' and she gave him a radiant smile. 'Won't you sit down?' indicating a seat.

Trafford was silent. Visiting was to him a social misery; he had no small-talk.

'I am so grieved they have sent you to the abomination of desolation—Pahari,' she continued, 'for between you and us there is a great forest fixed.'

'I hope I shall get in now and again. Scruby has put me up for the Club, and he will give me a bed sometimes.'

'And you must come to *us* often,' she urged, with flattering emphasis. The lady had been regarding this somewhat shy, good-looking young fellow with ever-increasing interest, gazing at him thoughtfully as though seeing in him a multitude of possibilities—being a woman who found a keen pleasure in exercising her skill on new material.

'Hullo, Ella!' exclaimed a stout, grey-haired man in the doorway. 'Why, I thought you were down with fever and "darwaza bund."'

'Yes, dearest, so I was,' beaming at him as she spoke; 'but I am better, you see. How a husband gives one away!' and she laughed, as she introduced the new Forest Officer.

Tom Heron, a hardy acclimatized man of fifty-five, was his own ancestor in every sense: one who had made his way by the sheer force of strenuous work, will power, and brains. There were but two things he cared for: Ella, his wife, and his great timber business. Ella, who was many years his junior, would one day emerge from jungly Chandi, and have her house in London, her opera box, her

toys. After a little desultory talk about Pahari and shikar, Mr. Heron drew Scruby into the verandah, in order to question him respecting a certain 'cutcha' road, and Trafford and the lady were left *tête-à-tête*.

She was a woman of extraordinary fascination, a practised flirt, and by degrees she drew from the shy visitor his first impressions, and nearly all his little experiences. She seduced him to talk, though he was not a talker—doing her part by a ready word, or a stimulating glance.

'The fact is, I was extremely anxious to meet you, Mr. Trafford,' she confessed, with a smile. 'Mrs. Sefton, a friend of mine, knows your mother, and when I saw your card, I made an effort, and dragged myself up. Are you not flattered? I should like to see a good deal of you—for your mother's sake. Oh, it is dreadful for a boy to have *no* woman friend in India—no one to sympathize with him, or open his heart to, is it not?' and she touched his arm with her delicate hand, and looked at him wistfully.

Trafford was tongue-tied, and once again he blushed.

'It's just a little bit selfish,' she went on in her soft drawl; 'you see we are only two—Tommy and myself. He is often away on business, and I am so lonely. I don't ride much; I loathe shikar and shooting; I've only my books, and piano, and my own thoughts; and often I long for some one to talk to, some sympathetic kindred spirit. Do you know that sometimes, when I feel too desolate, I *cry*,' and she gazed at him with a piteous expression in her marvellous black eyes.

'But—er—you have the people in the place here. You are better off than I am,' he ventured nervously.

'My dear boy! Have you seen what you call "the people in the place"? No! Mrs. Baxter, the missionary, who talks of converts and the price of charcoal; Mrs. Castellas, a poor dear invertebrate

old fool ; the Doctor, a bear ; the Engineer,' and she shrugged her shoulders : ' all good people of their class—but we have no ideas in common.'

This fascinating lady was always in quest of associates who had what she called ' ideas in common,' but what these ideas were was never actually defined.

' Now *you* look as if you belonged to the world I knew before I was buried here ; the very cut of your boots and your clothes is a joy to see, and does me good. You are so totally different to the run of the Chandi set ! You take me back to dear old England ! '

' Oh ! ' colouring violently, ' it 's only my new kit ; that won't last long, and I shall soon be wearing dirzee-made clothes like every one else.'

' No, I don't think Mrs. Trafford's son will ever be like every one else—anyway, to *me*. Now, do tell me, aren't you bored to death at Pahari ? Don't you feel lonely ? ' and she looked up at him under her eyelids.

' Well, it is not, so to say, gay,' he admitted.

' And I am not, so to say, gay here ! You and I are both isolated, solitary people, and must try and keep one another company—shall we ? ' and she emphasized her invitation with an appealing look. ' Are you fond of music ? ' she continued, in her soft, cajoling voice.

' Oh yes, I am awfully.'

' Do you sing ? '

' Well, in a fashion—more or less.'

' And so do I—another tie between us ! I 've just got out some delicious new songs, little Spanish serenades. We might try them over. Come and listen to this one.' As she spoke, she rose, trailed gracefully across the room, and sitting down, struck several chords on the rich-toned Schiedmayer.

' Awfully sorry to interrupt,' said Scruby, entering, followed by Mr. Heron ; ' but we have still the

Castellas and Mrs. Baxter to do before dark. So Trafford—don't hate me—but I must tear you away.'

'Oh, surely the Castellas can wait!' protested Mrs. Heron, with uplifted hands. 'Of course you will both stay and dine and play bridge, and I will sing—now there's a bribe!'

'Impossible, Mrs. Heron; many thanks,' replied the implacable Scruby. 'We have Maguire dining with us.'

'Ah! then another day,' she said, with a shrug of her graceful shoulders. 'Come soon,' holding her hand out to Trafford, and her eyes warmly seconded the invitation.

Mr. and Mrs. Heron accompanied their visitors into the porch; here she exclaimed—

'Why, there is dear darling old Gehazi! I must get him a lump of sugar,' and she beckoned to a servant. This delay gave time for a little more conversation, a few more flashing glances, and at last, after Gehazi had been regaled with half a pound of the 'best lump,' the visitors tore themselves away.

'She has taken a fancy to you, Trafford,' announced Scruby, 'you and your nice Europe clothes—*beware!*'

'Oh, bosh!' exclaimed his companion impatiently.

'Is it bosh? If Gehazi were like Balaam's ass, and could speak, he could tell you a tale of the long, wild gallops between her house and Pahari—day after day and night after night. Oh, Lord! what a fool that woman made of poor Charlie Frost!'

'Maybe he was born so,' suggested Trafford, already the lady's defender.

'Of course, there may be something in that; but I always think of a beautiful feline when I see Mrs. Heron gliding about—and she is a power here—precisely like a leopardess among a flock of sheep, and just as dangerous! Some day she will show her claws! Maguire likes her, so do the Castellas, the

padré, and even Collins. She purrs to them, and they swear by her ; but I 've always stuck out.'

'She is decidedly unexpected—so handsome ! I never saw such a pair of eyes in my life—and what taste !'

'Yes, and her taste is costly. She selects expensive things, such, for instance, as that emerald chain. I expect she dodged it out of some wood contractor—ultimately, of course, in an indirect way it comes out of Tom Heron's pocket. He is a rich man, but keeps a tight hold on the rupee bag, is sparing of cash for bridge and betting, and saving up every pice to make a great splash at home.'

'This seems such an outlandish sort of place for a woman like Mrs. Heron ! I can see her in London with her motors and opera box, but she is out of the picture here !'

'That 's a fact, and no one feels it more acutely than Mrs. Thomas Heron, who is a lady for a full blaze. They do say she has been behind the foot-lights.'

'Oh, nonsense—not she !'

'Maybe not—she 's a first-class actress—our leading star in every respect—quite wonderful in emotional parts. She has a temper, and, what 's so much the rage, "temperament." People talk even in the jungle, and there have been whispers. It is nine or ten years ago since Tom Heron went home to do "a cure" and get some clothes. Every one believed he was a confirmed old bachelor. Nevertheless, he returned accompanied by this beautiful unsuitable partner—unsuitable to Chandi I mean. She was reported to be a widow that he had met at Carlsbad, and they made it up as they strolled to and fro sipping water, to the strains of the band. I think she found this form of Indian life an unexpected revelation ; the lady, I am sure, had dazzling visions of balls, races, lots of limelight on a big stage, and I fancy the first year or two she, to talk jungle

talk—tore at her pickets ; but of late she has settled down. Of course, there are some alleviations—the solid fact of Tom's big banking account, a run to the hills, and an occasional *friend*. Martin, in the Gunners, who was shooting here last year, declared she was the divorced wife of a naval man, and that there were blank spaces in her life not satisfactorily accounted for ; but I must confess that Martin has a long tongue, and that I am always glad to hear anything bad about the lady.'

' Hullo, Scruby ! I say ! I'd no idea you could be so downright venomous,' cried his companion, his eyes dilated with surprise.

' Oh, I hate her ; and she hates me, only we cannot afford to quarrel openly, though we came near it one day when she invited me to guess her age, and I said forty.'

' Forty ! ' echoed Trafford ; ' impossible ! '

' Well, forty-five, I dare say, *is* nearer ; I grant that her figure and eyes would be hard to beat. Now we are going to Mrs. Baxter, the missionary, one of the salt of the earth. She dresses in brown holland, wears her hair in a bun, and has a figure like a cottage loaf ; an ugly little woman with more good in her finger than in the whole of Mrs. Heron's beautiful, well-dressed, wicked body.'

' And Mr. Baxter is at home ? '

' Yes, the first time, poor chap, for eighteen years. He and she do a splendid work in this district, and are good sensible people ; their orphans live the usual life—wear the usual kit—and are not set apart on a pedestal.'

As he concluded, the visitors rode up to a neat red-tiled bungalow with a sort of ' dependence ' or school ; close by were a number of portly buff fowls within a netted enclosure. A native girl with a bright face behind a large nose-ring ran forward, and said in English, ' Missus is out.'

' Oh, well, I'm sorry. Here, give her this card,'

replied Scruby ; ‘ and now for the Castle of the Castellas—it’s rather a gloomy hole, full of white ants ; but they get it cheap.’

The approach to the ant-haunted abode sloped down a steep track to a long dilapidated bungalow situated on the edge of the plateau ; it had an overhanging roof of thatch, and rather the air of a dissipated individual who, being ashamed of his condition, has pulled his hat far over his eyes. In front was a neat pot garden, and the rear of the premises commanded a limitless expanse of jawari and rice fields, bounded by a rolling sea of forest stretching unbroken to the horizon. A cow and two ponies (a brown and a piebald) were having their supper in zinc buckets at the end of the verandah. •

Scruby shouted his usual ‘ Qui hi ! ’ and a depressed servant in a much-mended coat tendered a Japanese tray for cards, and said in English—

‘ Please to come in.’

They found Mrs. Castellas in the drawing-room, extended on a cane sofa, reading a paper-backed novel ; her discarded shoes lay on the floor, but she jumped up and received her visitors with unaffected joy, utterly regardless of her darned black stockings with white toes.

‘ Now, Scruby, you dear boy, this *is* nice of you to bring Mr. Trafford so soon. Mr. Trafford, I am delighted to see you.’ As she held his hand, she beamed at him with her head on one side.

Mrs. Castellas was a dumpy little woman, whose once lovely yellow hair was now faded and thin. (A large plait of the original shade was boldly twisted round her head.) Her eyes, also faded, were still distinctly blue, her features small and perfectly formed. In her young days Mrs. Castellas must have been remarkably pretty ; but climate and poor health had withered her bloom, and she rouged her face without shame. Her age was probably about forty-five, but she looked ten years older, and was

a homely body, with a plaintive coaxing voice, pleading eyes, and all the 'little ways' that sat so charmingly upon her when she was 'sweet seventeen.'

'I do wish you were a bit nearer,' she said, still holding Trafford's hand, and patting it softly as she spoke.

'Thank you,' he replied, drawing back; 'I'm sure I echo your wish.'

'Now, sit down, sit down,' she urged hospitably. 'Bearer, tell the sahib, and bring in pegs.'

The man hesitated, then he cleared his throat and said—

'Whisky all done finish, mem sahib—Gresham Sahib coming to-day twice—three bottle "belati pani"' (soda water)—half-bottle whisky.'

'I assure you, Mrs. Castellas, I never touch whisky,' protested Trafford, 'and we are just going back to dinner—thank you all the same.'

'But surely you are not going to fly away yet? That will do,' and she waved to the bearer in the doorway. 'Tell the Miss Sahib, "whisky schrab" done finish. I do so like to see a nice English face,' turning to Trafford. 'Such a pity you are not here, but young men think nothing of distances—especially,' and she held her head on one side, 'if there is an inducement.'

'Oh, I know I shall have ample temptation to come to Chandi.'

'Oh, laws, you naughty, wicked boy, to an old lady like me! Go away with your foolish compliments—well, I'm sure!'

At this moment it occurred to Mrs. Castellas to look for her slippers, and these Scruby picked up and put on her pretty feet with extravagant gallantry—after being severely smacked with one of them.

Mrs. Castellas's drawing-room was eloquent of poverty and the painful struggle to make a smart appearance; the cheap cane furniture was covered with new and most evil-smelling cretonne; the

streaky damp walls were of a deep pink shade ; there was no piano, writing-table, or lounge—nothing expensive. A few washed-out jail dhurries concealing the shabby matting on the floor, some faded photographs, and an old carriage-clock were sole remnants of better days.

Certainly, there were flowers and grasses gracefully arranged, and dainty white muslin covers mitigated several gaudy cushions, but the whole apartment bore the hall-mark of pitiful economy.

'I hope Castellas is at home,' said his wife ; 'he will be so sorry not to see you, and show you some attention. Ah, we are not as we used to be in former times ! No, my dear boy, circumstances have been too much for us.' As she spoke she gave a loud unrestrained sob. 'Once we entertained—I had my carriage and pair—now not even a bullock tonga,' and she used her handkerchief. 'Castellas is very hopeful, and so clever—oh, a genius ! He says there is a fortune in the C.P. scent.'

'I 'm sure I hope so,' said Trafford politely.

'Yes, indeed, you hope so for poor *me*,' and there was a demand for commiseration in her voice. 'I am not accustomed to the jungle. No ! I was used to London—and am so afraid of wild animals. Do you know that a panther took one of our dogs out of this very verandah ?'

'What, here in Chandi ! You don't mean to say so !'

'Yes, I do, and I heard one blowing under the bathroom door when Bessie had her puppies ; and I 've seen snakes in the go-downs, and no end of scorpions—the black and yellow bad kind—and I, who used to faint at home if I came across a cockroach ! Oh, Otto,' as he entered, 'here is Mr. Trafford—the new Forest Officer. Mr. Trafford—Dr. Castellas.'

'Dr. Castellas' was a narrow-chested, thin individual ; he had chiselled Grecian features, dark

eyes with inky circles round them, a kindly countenance, and timid air. He offered Trafford a limp, damp clasp—it was almost the hand of a drowned man.

' Glad to see you ! Very glad. I am just back from my little factory ; it 's at Dhona, in your district, you know—about eight miles off.'

' I 'm afraid at present you know a great deal more about the district than I do. I have only just arrived.'

' Ah ! Scruby went and fetched you. His energy is extraordinary—I think he will go far. How I wish I could interest him in my business ; he is so clever, and has such a firm grasp of things—extraordinary ! '

' I understand you manufacture perfume ? '

' Oh yes, I have a distillery. You see, when I was at home studying for my degree, I also went in for chemistry ; it is a wonderful help. And I don't mind telling *you* that I am preparing the extract of the babul flower—it has a most delicate and delicious scent of subtle and suggestive character, and I believe I am at last on the verge, not merely of a discovery, but of a magnificent success. This essence is individual and Oriental.'

Trafford nodded, and he resumed—

' It is scarcely possible for the Western mind to understand perfumes ; the use of scent is so closely allied to the spirit and sense of hearing—extraordinary ! I have spent many weeks on this blend—and—'

At this moment the purdah was hastily swung aside and a girl of seventeen—an unmistakable Eurasian—entered. She had not inherited the fine features of either of her parents ; her face was round, her dark eyes wondering and prominent, her lips were full, and her figure for her age was too much developed. An abundance of reddish-brown hair, a set of milk-white teeth, and the beauty of youth

were all that Dame Fortune had flung to Lily Castellas.

Miss Castellas was trimly dressed in a well-starched white cambric, and wore a jaunty sailor hat and a smart red belt; in her hand she carried a tennis racquet.

'Hullo, Lily!' said Scruby; 'good afternoon.'

'I saw your ponies and I ran,' she began, turning her great round eyes on Trafford. 'I should have been so awfulee, *awfulee* vexed not to have seen you. We heard at the Club you had come last night, and so I—' here she burst into a fit of irrepressible giggles.

Her father hastened to cover her confusion by saying—

'I am sure we are all in a hurry—all glad—to welcome Mr. Trafford among us.'

'Unfortunately, I am not exactly among you,' he replied; 'I wish I were.'

'Now, Lily, where is Joan?' inquired her mother, in a plaintive key.

'I'm sure I cannot tell you. She is always beesy—doing the dhoby, I expect—or some other sort of silliness. That dhoby—he does tear one's things—look,' displaying a mended rent, 'he is a bad man—a Budmash. Joan mended it on me, before I started.'

'Who have you been playing tennis with, Lily?' inquired Scruby the ever curious.

'With Captain Gresham. Oh, such a good set! My! we did laugh. He is coming too—but he would not *run*. Here he is!'

At this moment Gresham walked in looking remarkably svelte and debonnaire; wearing neat white tennis shoes, a new suit of flannels, and an air that proclaimed—

'I'm a bit of all right—whatever others may be!'

'Hullo!' ejaculated Scruby. 'Come—I say!'

'Yes, I sent over for your tennis kit, Gosling,' he

explained, sinking into a chair (which gave a loud protesting creak); 'I knew you were on duty—not a bad fit, eh?' looking complacently at his arms and legs; 'but not much cut about them—flannels are the only wear this weather! I fancy myself in white—so does Lily. We dress alike—like to like, eh, Lily?' As he shot a significant glance at her, she coloured up to her thick hair.

'Lily, child, do come here!' said her mother; 'your face is flushed, you must not play so much—let me fan you.'

'Oh no, mamma, do not bother me. I'm arl right,' said Lily peevishly; 'do leave me a-lone.'

'We had intended to have a set of tennis,' remarked Scruby, still gravely eyeing his new clothes.

'Yes, but I lay six to one Mrs. Heron detained you,' rejoined Gresham airily; and then he began to talk to Castellas of some recent local incident, whilst Mrs. Castellas listened with breathless interest, and Lily figuratively hung upon his lips.

As Trafford considered the man who, lounging in the chair opposite to him, was absorbing every one's attention with his clever description of a bazaar row, he assured himself that he was unreasonably prejudiced—just a little rubbed up by Gresham's 'grand' reception. There must be something to justify the fact that the Chandi folk had accepted this stranger (who had dropped among them as from the skies) at his own exorbitant valuation. He was good-looking, and a gentleman; fastidious personal neatness and a carefully groomed appearance vouched for an early experience of tubbing and strict nursery discipline. He had a fine muscular frame, easy, attractive, confident manners, and last, but not least, a well-bred voice. Undoubtedly these were the assets by which Gresham had raised himself to importance, and placed the crown of Chandi upon his close-cropped head.

'We must be off,' said Scruby, springing to his feet.

'No, no, no,' shrilly protested Mrs. Castellas; 'you must stay and dine—there is not much,' laying her hand appealingly on Trafford's arm, 'no grandeur—only a hearty welcome—and—'

Here Lily made a hideous face, expressive of such horror and warning, that the remainder of the invitation died away upon her mother's lips.

'I say, I'll walk back with you fellows,' volunteered Gresham. 'I'm going your way.'

Then presently, with a great deal of talking, protesting, and 'wishing,' the entire family accompanied the three men into the verandah, loudly bewailing their departure.

'Oh my, goody me! what a love-lee pony you have, Gosling!' said Lily. 'Joan, too, has a beautee—the brown—it's just the one thing she is mean about, and will not lend to me. You are so near, I've a great mind to walk with you also.'

'No, no, no, dearie!' screamed her mother from the steps, 'you come in'; and presently the trio were suffered to depart in peace.

Trafford, as his pony breasted the little ascent from the bungalow, complacently assured himself that he had discovered two facts without Scruby's assistance: one, that Mrs. Castellas worshipped her dusky Eastern daughter; and the other, that the same daughter was unquestionably *épris* with 'Captain' Gresham.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A LITTLE DINNER

'DID I understand you to say that the Jabberwock was dining to-night?' inquired Gresham, as he walked beside Scruby's pony.

'Yes—any objection?'

'No, not more than usual. His jabber, his brogue,

and his old stories, get on my nerves. I had a " chit " from Mrs. Heron just now, asking me to look in after dinner. Chapman has turned up and they will have bridge, so if you don't mind, I 'll send over my things and dine.'

" Oh, I don't mind at all. Please yourself—you please me."

" I suppose you are off to-morrow, Trafford ? " said Gresham, throwing a nod to the new-comer.

" Not he ! " replied Scruby with emphasis.

" Yes, I am ! I had intended going back to-day."

" Pahari *is* rather alluring," sneered Gresham. " I say, you don't happen to want a pony, do you ? Because, look here, I can put you on to a rare good one ; he 's a bit light for the Rajah, but would carry you like a bird—fourteen hands rising six—price four hundred, and dirt cheap."

" No, thanks. I 've got two—and that will do me for the present."

" Surely you don't call this old Gehazi a mount ? " cried the other, slapping his quarters with his tennis bat. " Why, he is so ancient, he must have been in the Mutiny ; he has a head like a fiddle, and a body like a grasshopper ! "

" Oh, he does me all right ; I 'm not proud."

" So I hear you bought the chestnut from Karaki—the Malgoozar out by Khona."

" Yes," replied Trafford, mentally marvelling at the speed of Indian news.

" I expect he has done you finely ! The brute is so fat he can hardly waddle. I wouldn't give fifty rupees for him—what did you pay ? "

" Three hundred."

" Two hundred too much ! but you 'll live and learn. I say, Gos, I 'll run in by the short cut and dress first. My evening kit is at the Zoo. So long ! " and he started off at a lobbing run.

" I hope you note that Gresham sleeps in one house, dresses in another, dines in a third," observed Scruby,

looking after the white-flannelled borrower. ‘ What do you call that ? ’

‘ Arcadian simplicity,’ answered Trafford dryly.

‘ You mean, that we are simple Arcadians, eh ? ’ exclaimed Scruby, and his tone was edged.

‘ No—o—but it seems funny to a stranger—and you must make allowances. I was told that Chandi was Arcadia, and in Arcadia, of course, community of goods is the rule ; for instance, I at this moment am wearing a borrowed sun-hat.’

‘ Yes, you could not very well pay calls in the roof you brought with you. In the jungle, we are queer people, it’s our little way ; but let me impress upon you, that there is nothing funny about Gresham ! He is not at all “ a funny man,” and takes himself seriously in the *il faut se faire valoir* style ! I am glad you did not rise to the roan pony—that’s a stick if you like ! he has navicular, and is a man-eater ! ’

‘ What—the Rajah’s pony ! ’ cried Trafford.

‘ No ; the Rajah’s Secretary’s pony. Jambore is mighty convenient—when a thing turns out badly, it’s the Rajah ; when it’s all right, it’s Gresham. I expect Maguire and he have had a bit of a shake up. Most likely a card fight ! Maguire has a fiery Irish temper, though a more generous creature never breathed—he can’t bear to be done.’

‘ Who can, I’d like to know ? ’

‘ Here he is on the verandah, nursing Tom and Dick. That’s not a stick in his mouth—it’s *the moustache*.’

As they rode in, a tall figure threw down the dogs, and rose to his feet.

‘ Well, this is a nice way to ask a man to dinner, and most disrespectful to your superior officer, Mr. Gosling ! Trafford,—holding out his hand—‘ I’m sure. How are ye ? ’

‘ All right, thank you.’

‘ I see you have been doing the rounds ! Scruby

has been trotting you out ; *he* never lets the grass grow under his feet. He has his faults—conceit and insubordination—but I will say this much for him—he is the motive-power of the station.'

'Shut up ! shut up ! Qui hil !' screamed the parrot.

'That bird is the very devil ! Ye won't dress, eh ?'

'No, just wash your hands and run a comb through your hair, Trafford,' said Scruby. 'Gresham does all *my* dressing—and a bit over.'

At dinner, during a pause between the courses, Maguire leant back in his chair, and said—

'Now that I've taken the fine edge off my appetite, Trafford, I'd like to ask you a few questions. First of all—what is your general impression of Chandi ?'

'Excellent ! it combines within a small compass a great deal of beauty, amiability, hospitality and talent.'

'An' will ye listen to him ?' appealing to Scruby, 'an' ye talk at me for blarney ! And since ye mention beauty—I conclude you have seen Mrs. Heron ?'

'Delilah Heron,' interposed Scruby.

'Oh, don't mind him, Trafford ! He is bitter ; sure every one in this place adores and admires the lady. Our host is the exception—that proves the rule.'

'A rule of three,' muttered Scruby.

'She is uncommonly handsome,' began Trafford.

'Oh, my dear sir, she is more than that,' interrupted Maguire, with Irish enthusiasm, 'she is an enchantress ! as fascinating and alluring as Circe herself, and when you hear her sing, 'pon me word, I declare to you, she's a siren ! Oh, such a lovely melting voice ! it calls the very heart out of your body ; you'd think it was an angel you were listening to.'

'And you never made a greater mistake.'

'Oh, shut up, Scruby, shut up!' cried Maguire, extending a large hand; then turning to Trafford he said, 'The burrd learnt *that* from me. At one time I lived here along with the Gosling. We didn't fall out—no—but the Zoo was a bit too much for a quiet man. After finding the bear in me bed, and the mongoose among me most important departmental papers, I cleared. But to return to Mrs. Heron—she is a remarkable personality, so accomplished and clever; a woman to shine among the best. Of course, she has no scope *here*.'

'But makes the most of her miserable opportunities,' supplemented the unquenchable Scruby.

'Oh, will you shut up!' with an impatient thump on the table. 'She has foreign blood in her veins; those wonderful eyes are not Northern lights, and she has no taste for sport, or riding, like most English-women.'

'No; give her moonlight and a little stroll, or a dim room and coloured lamps, *tête-à-tête* dinners, melting love songs, cigarettes and cards. Eh?'

'Scruby—I'll—I'll *behead ye!*' shouted his superior officer.

'I'm sorry I did not see Miss Hampton,' remarked Trafford, endeavouring to effect a diversion.

'Ah yes—now there's a good girl! and a girl who makes life pleasant for other people,' announced Maguire, delivering the verdict with both elbows on the table, and an air of weighty authority. 'The climate tries her, and she looks delicate—almost as if she'd come to pieces in your hands; but she has a great spirit, is pure English, and loves the morning air, and tennis, and a good laugh.'

'She doesn't get a chance to laugh much,' remarked Scruby sarcastically.

'Perhaps she laughs at nothing,' suggested Trafford.

'No, indeed,' protested Maguire; 'the only little pleasure she has is that brown pony, and an odd

game of tennis, then she 's as happy as the day is long.'

' I saw her half-sister—she—is—is—'

' Faix, you may say so ! ' said Maguire promptly filling the gap ; ' she is no beauty, and has a heavy hand with the powder-puff—sometimes you 'd think her face had been in the flour-bin !—she 's just soft, young, and susceptible, and only half-educated, the poor child ! Well, beauty is sometimes a great snare,' and he sighed heavily.

' To the man—or woman ? ' inquired Scruby.

Mr. Maguire made no reply ; he was staring straight before him, and appeared to be lost in contemplation.

Trafford looked at him critically. He was powerfully built but by no means clumsy ; had a large hooked nose, on either side of which twinkled a clever and searching Irish eye. His hair—which was thinning on top—was brown, as was also his magnificent moustache ; his able hands were well kept, and he wore a conspicuous ring emblazoned with his family crest.

Kevin Maguire was an honest, kindly fellow, and the very first glance at his face inspired confidence. On the present occasion, his sentimental reflections were disturbed by the sound of creaking wheels and the hoofs of horned cattle.

' It 's the doctor in his cow cart ! ' explained Scruby. ' Trafford, he is coming to return your call the same day—like royalty.'

' Like curiosity, you mean,' corrected Maguire.

As he spoke, the caller entered—a middle-sized, middle-aged man, with grizzled hair, high cheekbones, and a keen deep-set glance. Nodding, and seating himself, he turned abruptly to Trafford and said—

' I thought I 'd find you here—the new arrival, I presume ? '

' Yes, I 've only just come to Pahari.'

'Um—hope you won't go sick there—too far from first aid—no native apothecary—nearest doctor old Castellas at Dhona, and his stink factory.'

'Does he practise?'

'I should hope not! He never took out a diploma—but he probably knows the symptoms of cholera.'

As Trafford looked disconcerted, Scruby intervened with a hasty protest.

'Come, I say, doctor, don't be *too* cheerful!'

'Young man,' continued the doctor, addressing Trafford, 'you will have to keep goats and a filter, and then you'll be all right.'

'But by all accounts it's not so easy to keep goats at Pahari,' objected Maguire. 'Frost said the panthers always took his as fast as he got them. He never had any milk.'

'Ah, well, he wasn't one for much *milk*,' responded the doctor, nodding expressively, as he helped himself from a jug of barley water; 'that was his misfortune, poor chap! Every man is his own worst enemy.'

'I believe you have lots of tiger over near you, Trafford,' remarked Maguire; 'they are jostling one another in the Rodore Bandi.'

'Yes,' he answered in the same key, 'you can't put your foot in the forest without standing on the tail of one.'

'Oh, well, joking apart, from all accounts they are many and bold. A party was out there last hot weather—you remember, Scruby?—Watson and his brother and some officers from Jubbulpore. They were beating for a fine tiger marked down by their shikaris, and tried hard for him all day over a widish circle, and did their big best; when they got back to camp, fagged out and ravenous, you can imagine their horror when they found that in their absence the tiger had called in, and carried off and eaten their *cook*! They had no dinner—but he fared well.'

'A tiger with a sense of humour,' said Trafford.  
'I should like to get him.'

'Bah! what a chance you have!' scoffed Maguire.

'And so you've been doing the station, Mr. Trafford,' observed the doctor; 'and went on from me to the Herons, no doubt?'

'Yes.'

'And saw Mrs. Heron. I need not ask if you enjoyed the interview?'

'No—she—er—is—she is charming—and—' again he found himself at a loss.

'Astonishing. Yes; with such eyes, the gift of speech is superfluous. Her fascinations are irresistible.'

Something in the doctor's expression impelled Trafford to say—

'Do you think we ought to discuss a lady——'

'Hear, hear!' cried Scruby, with an ironical laugh.  
'Behold another fearless champion clanking into the lists!'

'Why not?' asked the doctor grimly. 'Are we saying anything that would not gratify our subject? Anyhow, it is agreed on all sides that Tom Heron is the most fortunate of mortals.'

He glanced from one to the other of the two young men: at Scruby, with his close-cropped light locks, and keen expressive face; then his gaze rested on Trafford. Trafford was undeniably handsome, with clean-cut features, and deep-set romantic eyes—a very proper-looking young blade—quite the story-book hero! However, his light would be hidden in the jungle, where there would be none to admire his well-knit figure and classic features—none but squirrels and parakeets!

'Chandi has one advantage,' resumed the doctor (in what Scruby would describe as his best pulpit manner), 'there's little fear of either of you two boys falling into the blind ditch of matrimony. Here, there are no girls—our only damsel has her

hands too full to think of lovers. Now at home the fisher girls swarm. Husbands are easily caught, if the young ladies know the real fly.'

'And what may that be?' inquired Maguire.  
'A green Highlander, I suppose?'

'The fly that never fails is called "Egoism." Men marry to talk—crafty young women give them lots of line, and allow them to explain their characters and tastes, and so on. The man marries, believing he has found some one to whom he can talk about himself—permanently—but soon the poor devil finds out his mistake—he is a listener for life!'

'I hereby give notice,' said Scruby, springing to his feet, 'that I shall not marry till I'm fifty—if then—'

The doctor looked up at him, and nodded his head slowly.

'My good Gosling, you are just the very one that will succumb. The first girl that will have the hypocrisy, and patience, to pretend she likes your jabber, will be Mrs. Scruby. Maguire,' turning to him, 'joking apart, it is time that *you* were looking about you.'

'Ah, now do ye think so, doctor?' he rejoined, with a little complacent giggle. 'Well, maybe you are right. If any fine handsome young woman of good family, and with a nice fortune, takes a fancy to me—I'll not baulk it!'

And as he concluded, he threw himself back in his chair, thrust his hands in his pockets, and surveyed his companions with an air of magnificent benevolence.

There was a momentary silence, and Scruby, who had darted out, returned carrying a little fat pup with a black-and-tan head and blinking eyes, which he deposited on Trafford's lap.

'Now don't say *I* never give you anything!' he said. 'Fanny,' indicating an anxious mother, 'hopes you will be good to Henry, and not cut his tail.'

'Thanks awfully,' said Trafford, delighted with his first very own dog. 'He is a little beauty, and I shall stick to him.'

'Oh, so you are going to add a dog to your troubles,' remarked the doctor, with an indulgent smile.

'Yes, indeed, I am; a dog is no trouble, but a companion.'

'Not much of a companion about that half-weaned chap,' said Collins, with a kindly glance at the whining puppy. 'By all accounts, young man, your work is cut out for you. My apothecary tells me that the forest folks say you are very *clever*; so already a lot of skins and horns are being hustled out of reach, and a guard who is honest—English style—is suffering from a pain—that may be the rains—and may be poison.'

'Well, I sincerely hope your apothecary will pull him through. I'll be off to-morrow at daylight. There has been an enormous amount of thieving, I'm afraid.'

'Yes; don't you trust Beaufort,' said Scruby emphatically.

'Aye, and Beaufort has a big man behind him,' added the doctor; and an inclination of his left hand gave Trafford to understand that he had complete hold of the situation.

'Who?' he asked eagerly, and his eyes were fixed on the speaker with keen insistence.

'Ah, that I must leave to your discernment! What news from home do you bring us?' he continued, abruptly turning the conversation.

'Oh, we are just jogging along trying to keep our heads above water, and be abreast of the times. I expect in a year or two, we shall be flying over here for a week-end in airships.'

'Heaven forbid!' exclaimed the doctor piously; 'the six- and three-week fellows, are bad enough: prating ignoramuses who come out and talk nonsense, and try and physic this old inscrutable country.'

I 've been in India, off and on, for twenty-five years. I keep my eyes and ears open. I speak Urdu, and several other tongues of sorts ; and though I 've been persevering and pushing, I give you my word, she and I have scarcely a bowing acquaintance yet.'

' And what about the unrest we hear so much of at home ? or do you not experience it here ? ' asked Trafford.

' No,'—leaning back and crossing his legs—' we are out of the traffic—off the high road—just jungle folk, black and white—alike indifferent to the scheming, slaving, seething, big world beyond the forest and the cotton-fields. In *my opinion* ' (here Maguire and Scruby winked gravely at one another), ' ninety per cent. of the Indian population have no part in the agitation. They do not love us, and never will. We, for one reason or other, have failed to make ourselves understood. Some believe we have introduced the plague ! They suppose we share the nature of malignant gods, and have their power, and therefore the vast majority are passive and will be passive.'

' Yes, yes,' assented Trafford, an ever attentive listener thirsting for knowledge.

' In spite of what is said, the English have brought prosperity to India, and poured out money and men's lives without stint. Look at the railways, the roads, and hospitals ; but we want to bring too much of the *West* into the *East*, and there is no doubt an active and malicious propaganda, and a genuine evil *does* exist at the root of our Indian system.'

' Hear, hear ! ' cried Scruby, thumping on the table.

' With the rise of the middle class, Britain has fostered education, and if you provide a larger amount of native talent than there is a demand for—the surplus is likely to turn sour ! '

' And that 's a fact,' agreed Maguire ; ' faix, there 's no denying it ! '

' The openings in Government service, and the professions, are not in proportion to the candidates.

What is the educated candidate to do? Tell me that?

Here the speaker looked round his audience, and paused for a reply.

'There is Law, the world of Journalism, and political agitation before him; and the Englishman's extraordinary tolerance suffers a disappointed man to say and write much what he feels—or, at least, pretends to feel. The native aristocracy, the small land-owners, and the commercial class are sound; so are the troops, which are generally loyal to the bone—though it is whispered that a creeping spirit of discontent is fanned by agitators. Then in the bazaars, many awful lies are deliberately spread by emissaries—under the guise of Swamis or Hindoo missionaries. They preach treason, and the downfall of the Raj.'

'Yes, and India by all means for the Indians,' supplemented Scruby.

'But who *are* the Indians, and the true and original lords of the soil? Not these clamouring Bengalis, though I believe *some* are Dravidian, or turbulent Marathis, but aborigines such as the Gonds, the dark races of the south, the Todas, the Moplahs of the West Coast, those whom the conquering Aryans and Scythians have driven down to the seashore—or into forest fastnesses.'

'I declare to goodness, doctor, ye talk like a book!' exclaimed Maguire admiringly. 'It's a treat to listen to ye.'

'Oh, talk is cheap,' he answered contemptuously, 'especially out here. However, we have one point in our favour: natives, especially of different castes, do not trust one another. But there is no doubt we live in anxious times. The Indian Empire wants a strong and steady hand to guide her—in fact, a man to ride the storm; or, to choose another metaphor, a spark, and—like one of your forest fires, Trafford.—who can tell where it may end?'

He paused, and heaved a profound sigh ; and there was a momentary and grave silence.

' Well, anyhow, the forest folk are peaceful enough,' announced Scruby, in a cheerful voice.

' Yes,' agreed the doctor. ' There's nothing of the modern strenuous life about *them* ! They have the ideas and manners of early ages. For instance, the Gonds, the flat-faced primitive aborigines, were here long before the Aryan invasion. They are simple as then in their customs, and believe in good hunting, strange gods, and devils. The Santhals, another race nearer Calcutta, are fine fellows, carry themselves valorously, and speak the truth.'

' The Santhals have one peculiar custom,' added Scruby : ' once a year, the head of every family in a village assembles his relatives under his roof. They shut themselves up, stuff their ears, and sit on the floor together, and there shriek all the abominable words and bad stories they know. This goes on for hours, till they are absolutely worn out, gasping and speechless.'

' Such a unique idea—such a veritable feast of words might be happily inaugurated in other places,' remarked the doctor, who was now nursing the puppy, ' say, for example, a little English town, or a small Indian station ; it would be a splendid safety valve, and let off any quantity of lying, slandering, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness ! Of course, such a strong antidote would be unnecessary *here*—here, we are immaculate and love one another,' and he paused, ' but the experiment might be tried elsewhere. It is my opinion, that in a little station, the climate, the limited society, and the monotony of life, bring out the cat in woman, and the wild beast in man ! '

' I say, doctor, you want a pill—and a blue pill ! ' suggested Scruby.

' No, you impudent young ass ! I want my tonga. There's the rain, and I can't have my

bullocks drowned. You are all very brilliant and interesting, and I'm desperately sorry to leave you—but go I must. Trafford, I'm glad to make your acquaintance, and I hope you may never want to see me in my official capacity. I'll, however, offer you a sound prescription to take away with you to Pahari district.'

'Thank you, thank you,' he answered vaguely.

'Don't be *too* sweet,' raising his hand expressively.

'There is a Spanish proverb: "Who makes himself all sugar, the flies will eat him up." They swarm in the forests.'

'Capital, very sound! Very sound advice,' agreed Scruby. 'Bears,' looking straight at his guest, 'are terribly fond of honey, aren't they?'

The doctor turned his back on him impatiently, and without a word made for the door.

'I say, Collins,' said Maguire, 'you may as well give me a lift. It will save you the trouble of attending me for a bad cold.'

The two men went forth, growling about the rain—which streamed in sheets, spouted from the gutters, and ran down the steps in cataracts. Then the door of the bullock cart was shut with a hearty bang, and Maguire's loud laugh was the last sound heard as the clumsy vehicle splashed and joggled out of the compound.

## CHAPTER IX

### ADVENTURES IN THE BANDI

IN spite of Scruby's pressing, and even imperious invitation, the new Forest Officer returned to Pahari the following day. The morning had brought him no less than three invitations to dinner—from the Club, the Herons, and the Castellas—but waving temptation aside, early in the afternoon he set forth;

transporting in his train, Manoo, a capable bearer, and the fox-terrier pup Henry—recently weaned, and aged seven weeks. Manoo and Henry travelled together in a chakra or country cart drawn by two speedy bullocks ; they also carried besides the bearer (who kindly permitted Henry to suck his thumb) some special curry stuff, a supply of books, a basket of fresh vegetables, a new brown teapot and a folding chair. The freight was a tight fit—as any one who has ridden in a chakra will testify.

Scruby accompanied his friend a couple of miles on his way, and was sincerely sorry to part with him ; for although Trafford was rather a reserved sort of fellow, he liked him, and between them was one great bond—the freemasonry of youth !

Trafford, mounted on the Malgoozar's chestnut—a proud creature as sleek, fat, and prosperous as his late master—rode through the green and dripping Bandi feeling strangely happy and elated, once again his own man ! He had found new friends—Gosling—Maguire—the Doctor—Mrs. Heron—Gresham ? Well, so far, *he* was an uncertain quantity. The young official keenly enjoyed his journey amidst glorious solitudes—these vast, mysterious, solemn woods—*his* woods—his own particular charge. For miles he rode through the great sâl forest, which, with its tall straight trunks and dim religious light, recalled the pillared aisles of a cathedral ; and he felt a sense of awe descending upon him—an impression derived from the lofty dignity of these towering trees.

But once out in open glades the mood passed. He chased, captured, and put to death a rare butterfly—whose remains he pinned on his topee ; he gathered a white-and-orange blossom of the exquisitely fragrant ‘Nursinga,’ and stuck it in his button-hole. As he rode onwards mile after mile, busy with pleasant thoughts, his new bearer, his pup, his new pony, it gradually dawned upon him that he had lost the way. He now remembered Scruby’s warning,

'Always keep to the left—you'd think the road was as straight as the nose on your face, but it's not, and for a forest officer to be lost in his own Reserve would be an unheard-of scandal.'

He turned about, and endeavoured (too late) to follow Scruby's instructions. Had he been riding Gehazi, this misadventure would not have befallen him ; but unfortunately the Malgoozar was as complete a stranger as he was himself—in fact, the Malgoozar had been secretly bearing in the supposed direction of his own village on the borders of the Bandi, and the further they proceeded the worse their plight became ; once the new official caught sight of a stealthy native with a gun, and shouted to him, 'Hi ! hi ! Come here !' but the poacher instantly darted into the densest scrub, and so vanished.

It appeared to Trafford that there was a deadly monotony about this division of the Reserve. Surely he had passed that clump of bamboos, that group of sâl trees, with their masses of cream-coloured flowers, over and over again ? In despair he turned out of the wider track, and began to follow a wood-cutter's path, which forced itself through the rank vegetation of a dense, dark jungle, into which the foot of man had seldom penetrated. Here, in the damp sweltering heat, their leaves sweating moisture, were enormous creepers with thick snake-like stems ; and strange, weird plants, with large, flaring blossoms—monstrous of shape, gorgeous in colour, unflowerlike and poisonous ; and Trafford realized that he was now in the heart of a reeking, primeval forest, in a place that seemed full of mutterings and whisperings, and towards which he felt an ever increasing, creeping aversion. Blood-curdling adventure stories that had kept him awake when a boy, and tragic tales of the Australian bush, thrust themselves persistently into his mind. Would he ever again emerge into sane, cheerful space ? In heat and gloom, and breathing sweet, sickly odours, they toiled along the

ill-defined narrow track ; the fat, unaccustomed chestnut, in a lather of heat, and actually grunting from his extraordinary exertions ! .

Suddenly he pricked up his ears, and gave a whinny so loud and violent that it shook his rider from head to foot. The reason of his excitement became immediately evident. Turning a corner, they came upon an open glade and a grazing pony carrying a side-saddle ; at a little distance was his mistress seated on a log. Two or three letters lay scattered on the wet moss, and their contents had evidently been distressing, for the girl, whose mass of dark hair was bare, sat with her head buried in her hands, her face completely hidden. But there was no mystery whatever respecting her occupation—the solitary figure was crying her heart out, and so absorbed in her sorrows, as never to realise the approach of an intruder, till another whinny from her pony caused her to raise a tear-stained countenance, and to behold a handsome young man on a streaming chestnut, confronting her within a few yards. She looked bewildered, as she put up her hands to her disordered hair, and rising hastily, discovered a slim figure in a serge skirt and white blouse.

' I say, I 'm awfully sorry to disturb you,' Trafford began, as he dismounted and removed his hat, ' but the fact is, I am a total stranger in these parts, I have lost my way, and have been wandering about in a sort of maze for a couple of hours.'

' Where do you wish to go to ? ' she asked, with a smothered sob.

' I want to get out somewhere near Pahari—if I can.'

' And you are turning your back upon it. I 've never been there, but I believe I can put you on the road.'

' No, no, I really will not trouble you—if you would tell me the direction.'

' I 'm afraid I 'm no good at describing, and it 's

rather intricate. You see the forest looks so simple—but it really is a maze—the road to Pahari is not far from here.'

As she concluded, she put on her hat, called up her pony, and before Trafford could interfere had swung herself into the saddle with practised ease. There was nothing for him to do but carefully collect her letters from the grass, and hand these up to their owner, who stuffed them hastily into the saddle pocket, and coloured to her hair.

' I 'm—I 'm afraid you are in some fix ? ' he ventured awkwardly.

The strange young lady made a slight gesture with her hand, and rode before him into a narrow wood path in dignified silence ; and he, supposing that he had mortally offended, felt furious with himself for an awkward, inquisitive, meddling ass.

The path suddenly widened into a spacious forest track. Once more Trafford found himself in dim religious light among aisles of towering sâl trees ; and as their ponies ranged alongside, he saw that tears were streaming down the face of his companion.

' Oh, *please*, don't notice me,' she urged, in a strangled voice. ' I came away into the jungle to have a good think and a good cry, and you have discovered me—it was a bit of bad luck for both ; we cannot help ourselves.'

' I should think it uncommonly good luck if I might help you. Can't I do anything ? '

She dried her eyes with a wisp of cambric, and looked at him steadily. Her eyes were red, and troubled—but full of innocence and candour.

' Yes, for once I believe speech *would* be a relief,' she answered, with a sort of nervous desperation, ' though I always try to keep my worries to myself ; but, as you happen to be a stranger, and I shall never, never see you again—I don't mind telling you that I am in what you call a fix, and most desperately miserable. My trouble is about—' she turned away

her face, and her listener who expected to hear of 'love,' was amazed when she uttered the word 'money.' Money, and money troubles, seemed so sordid, so completely alien and out of place, in the soft green depths of this wonderful primeval forest—a far more likely *mis en scène* for topics of sentiment and tenderness.

His companion was of course Miss Hampton, and the unhappy girl had fled away into the woods to meditate over her family's difficulties, and enjoy a nice little private breakdown.

'Yes, it is all about bills and hopeless debts,' she went on; 'and a letter that came to-day is positively the last straw!'

'I say! you can tell me whatever you like,' said Trafford eagerly, 'it will be absolutely safe. Couldn't I do something? Two heads are better than one.'

'Oh, we are long past that stage!' she replied, with a touch of quiet bitterness; 'our condition is desperate, and yet I am the only one of our family who appears to see it.'

'Then, possibly it is not so serious as you suppose.'

'You do not know,' she exclaimed; 'my relations lack what is called "the money sense." Yes, every one of them. They have a childish idea that they may order and order—and *never* pay. I am the housekeeper and do my best to make both ends meet. Sometimes when I think we are getting out of a swamp of difficulties, down comes a heavy old debt—and we sink again into the slough of despond.'

'I say, what hard lines!' ejaculated Trafford, and he looked sympathetically at his companion, who was evidently highly strung; her face was now set and tearless, her slight, erect figure seemed instinct with resolution and vitality. How strange that he should be guided on the road to Pahari by a pretty—yes, very pretty girl, with tragic dark blue eyes, who was pouring out to him all her domestic troubles. Was this yet another phase of Indian life?

' You see,' she resumed, ' my people are naturally generous and hospitable ; they like to keep open house, and to lavish money with both hands. Now, all their money has come to an end, and unless I can find means to settle a certain bill, we shall be what is called sold up.'

' Sold up ! ' repeated Trafford ; ' you mean bankrupt ? '

' I mean that all our miserable little belongings, shabby and cheap as they are, will be offered by the bazaar auctioneer, and we shall not have a roof to cover us. I have, however, thought of something.'

' Yes ? ' His attitude expressed attention.

' This pony is mine. I bought him when I came out for four hundred rupees. I know some one who has always wanted him ; for he is well-bred and up to weight, but oh—' and she looked at Trafford with woebegone misty eyes, ' he is so cruel, so hard on his animals—it will nearly break my heart.'

' Have you no other alternative ? '

' No ; Sirdar must go—poor, honest, honourable fellow,' laying her hand on his neck. ' It is dreadfully unjust that you are to be the one to suffer ; but I must write and offer you up to-morrow. There is not a day to be lost, and oh, how I hate that man to have you ! '

' Will you sell him to me ? ' inquired Trafford. ' I guarantee that I shall be a kind master—I'm fond of animals.'

' You ! ' staring at him with astonishment. ' But what do you want with another pony ? What could you do with him ? '

' Why, ride him, of course ! I shall have lots of work for three ; the brown, this chestnut, and old Gehazi.'

' Gehazi ! ' she echoed. Her face grew suddenly white, and quivered like a pale flame. Then she turned upon him with an expression of horror.

' You—you—don't mean to say'—the words

seemed to ooze from her lips—‘that you are the new officer at Pahari?’

‘Yes, I am. My name is Trafford, I’m on my way there now.’

‘And I thought you were one of the naturalists one sometimes comes across in the forest,’ glancing at his hat, ‘looking for plants and butterflies. You have a friendly face, and I felt so desperately alone, and so utterly miserable—I’ve told you everything—I’ve let myself go for once—what *shall* I do?’

‘Nothing at all, but trust me,’ he answered, with composure. ‘I think you must be Miss Hampton? Whatever you have said to me—I shall—forget.’

‘Oh no, how could you! And I, who pride myself on my reserve, have opened my heart to—to—’

‘To a friend, if I may say so,’ he interposed hastily. ‘Please listen. I’m not used to girls—to tell you the truth I’ve not come across many—but if you would allow me to talk to you just like my own sister—I’d be proud. May I?’

‘And what do you wish to say to me?’ she asked, in a frozen voice.

‘For one thing, that I’m looking for a pony exactly like yours, and I should be glad to buy him for five hundred rupees.’

She held up her hand in emphatic depreciation, but he went on—

‘Yes, I assure you he is well worth it. I’ll forward a cheque to-morrow, and you will ride him till the rains are over.’

‘I am most grateful; but four hundred is his price—and I’ll send him to you at once.’

‘And I shall return him on the spot! At present, I’ve only a stable for two—and that has but half a roof.’

‘Very well, I’ll keep him for a week or ten days; it will be a comfort to know that he is well cared for, and I shall see him sometimes when you ride in. I

think,' as they came to a wide clearing, ' we are on the right road now.'

' I was lost like one of the Babes in the Wood,' said Trafford, anxious to turn the conversation. ' I hear the outer world call all the people round about "The Babes in the Wood."'

' But I don't think they are altogether so infantile and innocent as is supposed—though there are worthy people to be found in the forests.'

Trafford was recalling Maguire's verdict on the young lady herself: ' Now, *there's* a good girl for you!' Yes, here was this girl, who had sold the very pony she was riding, for the benefit of others, and who seemed to have sacrificed much more for these same reckless, helpless people, to judge from her delicate and fragile appearance. Oh, what a frail, weak champion to stand between the Castellas—and ruin! She looked to him like some fair English flower, transplanted to wither and die in the Indian jungles.

' I 'm always rather nervous on this particular road, because of the wounded buff,' she remarked. ' He is said to be hanging about in this direction—in order to avenge himself on some one.'

' Yes; I had a glimpse of him the other day, but luckily he had his back to me, and such a back! He plunged across the track and never saw me. I need not tell you that I don't want to meet him again—without my rifle.'

' And I should be afraid of him—rifle or no rifle—I am a poor shot. I cannot hit a haystack.'

' You can do other things, I am told; you sketch very well, Miss Hampton?'

' I sketch, certainly, but as to very well—I am afraid I must say No. I dabble, trying in vain to copy these wonderful rainy sunsets, and some of the forest trees and green twilight effects. If I live to be an old woman they will give me pleasure—daubs as they are—and recall the lovely——'

Suddenly she ceased speaking, and seemed to listen anxiously.

'What is the matter?' he asked, observing her look of pale alarm, her expression of strained and almost painful attention.

'Please don't think I am an hysterical idiot—but listen, Mr. Trafford—what is *that*?'

'That' was the far, far away, indistinct, yet gradually approaching sound of a crashing of branches, and faint thunder of hoofs.

'Oh,' turning on him a ghastly face, 'it's the buffalo! I am sure of it. What *shall* we do?'

'Keep cool,' he answered, his eyes growing keener and his manner changing; 'he may not wind us, and even if he does, that brown will gallop for miles.'

'Ah, you don't know! I'm not really an abject coward; but Mr. Crawfurd's body was carried into the scent-works when I happened to be there. I saw it—how I wish I hadn't—the sight haunts me—it was too shocking, and the very name of a buffalo makes me simply sick with fear.'

'You need not be afraid, I assure you,' he answered cheerfully. 'However, we may as well jog on quietly all the same. I promise you, on my honour—the buffalo shall not touch you.'

For all his brave words, there had been a look of anxiety in Trafford's eyes, not lost upon his companion, who instantly put her animal into a sharper canter. But still the crashing sound came nearer, and the thunder of hoofs more distinctly audible, also an occasional threatening bellow.

'See—he has tracked us!' she cried suddenly, looking over her shoulder. 'He'—and her voice rose to a shriek—'is coming!'

Yes, there was no longer room for doubt or delay; at the far end of the ride a ponderous animal, head down, tail erect, was storming along the soft grassy track, moving at an extraordinary pace, considering

his bulk and weight. Then neck and neck the ponies raced ; they needed no urging, for in their wake was an infuriated monster, with a very human memory. As up one forest path, down another, they tore along, the girl asked herself if it was not all a hideous dream, a nightmare, from which she was bound to awake ? or was this death itself in material form that hunted, and would presently overtake her ?—and she did not want to die—no, no, no, not yet.

The season was the middle of the rains, going was heavy, indeed, in some parts a morass. The terrified, sweating, straining ponies did their utmost, but their pace was forced to subside to a canter, then a trot, for in many places they were over their fetlocks in the tenacious red mud ; and always, there was behind them the angry bellowing of an implacable follower, and a never-ceasing, never-resting pursuit ! Had there been time, Trafford would have turned the ponies loose and clambered with Miss Hampton into a tree—but delay would mean destruction ; the buffalo was too near, and where they were, the forest was mostly composed of frail young sâl saplings.

The chase had been both hot and long ; Trafford lashed the lagging Malgoozar to his utmost speed, he was almost done—indeed, the two animals were nearly spent—when they reached an opening where four wood-cutter's paths met ; they dashed through a pool of water into one of these, and hastily took shelter behind a clump of thick ber bushes. The scrub was of the kind that forms a dense undergrowth in the parent forests, and thus concealed, the riders held their breath in throbbing anticipation. It is such moments of acute suspense that whiten heads ! If the buffalo found and charged them—one at least was lost. A hot, oppressive afternoon silence brooded in the forest ; it would almost seem as if the very atmosphere were breathless, and gripped by some painful emotion ; there was not a sound to

be heard but the quick panting of the ponies and the ponderous gallop of their monstrous pursuer.

After a brief but tremulous delay, Trafford ventured to make a cautious observation between the leaves of a huge creeper. There, not two hundred yards away, was their enemy at a standstill—apparently at fault. His gigantic head was turned sideways, his nose was uplifted with a suspicious tilt, and he appeared to be gazing in their direction. Trafford noted his powerful appearance, his sweeping horns, enormously strong white-stockinged legs, and the great ears slowly turned forward and back. For an instant, he stood as motionless as a rock, then having made up his mind, he suddenly set off down another track at a lumbering canter.

The unbearable tension was ended, and they were safe!

'It's all right—he's gone,' declared Trafford, taking off his topee and mopping his forehead, whilst Miss Hampton closed her eyes, and uttered a silent thanksgiving. She looked so small and white, so completely shattered; she was shaking like a leaf—the reaction had set in.

'How awful if she were to *faint*!' Trafford said to himself, then aloud: 'I believe he has chased us almost to Pahari—I think I remember that crooked old tree. Would you come on, and get the pony rubbed down, and have a cup of tea, and I'll ride back with you when the moon rises?'

'Thank you,' she assented hysterically, but controlling herself with a great effort. 'I do feel rather done—and I'm afraid I cannot go much farther.'

## CHAPTER X

## TEA FOR TWO

PAHARI lay barely a mile ahead, and the pair on their smoking animals rode towards it in absolute silence ; for Trafford's sensitive instinct assured him that his companion in their recent adventure must be left to recover herself undisturbed.

As he and his guest dismounted close to the verandah, the new bearer and the cook received them with dignified salaams, and unbounded but secret astonishment.

'The sahib and a miss sahib !' Surely this was against all order and custom.

'We have been chased by the big buffalo,' explained their master ; 'please get some hot water in my room for this lady, and make tea and toast. I shall want the grey'—and he looked up to the sky—'in an hour's time. Do you think you can start in an hour ?' he asked, as Miss Hampton toiled wearily up the steps.

'Oh yes ; if I could only wash my face, have a cup of tea, and rest a little, I shall be all right,' and she followed him into the bungalow.

There was no woman on the premises (except grass-cutters—the syces' wives), and the bearer undertook an ayah's business—brought in hot water, towels, and a piece of soap, and made deft arrangements in the new bedroom. Trafford went in to give a look round. Yes, it was as neat as possible. Manoo, who arrived early, had made the change, and distributed the few things he had brought on the chakra. All the lumber and baggage was removed ; the place no longer gave forth the essence of dry-rot and damp, but a clean healthy scent of leather from new gun-cases and boots.

Tea, buttered toast (buffalo butter) and biscuits

were laid in the verandah, and in ten minutes, Miss Hampton, looking another person, appeared carrying Henry (who had forced his acquaintance upon her) in her arms. Tear-stains removed, her hair knotted up, her expression composed, Trafford again recognized the fact that his guest was a remarkably pretty girl, although she looked thin and delicate, and her pale complexion testified to two hot weathers and two steamy rains. She was rather small, slight, and erect as a wand; in fact, she carried her dark head unusually high! As for her face, it was full of contrasts: the nose was insignificant, but the upper lip, mouth, and teeth were perfection—it was too wide across the cheek-bones (*à la Japonaise*), but then the dark deep-set blue eyes were of the West, and both eloquent and glorious; delicate ears, nostrils, and fingers indicated race, and Trafford noted, with a satisfaction akin to joy, that she did not bear even a remote resemblance to her mother or sister.

(Naturally Joan had received from Lily, early, exaggerated and copious descriptions of 'Traffy.'

'He was awfulee handsome—oh my! you just should see him! But so grand, and so stand-off—no jokes at all, noa, he could not wink if he tried, and had next to nothing to say for himself.'

Her mother's verdict was, 'A dear, nice fellow, and so polite.' Mr. Castellas's opinion was compressed into tabloid form and the solitary word 'Extraordinary.'

The sky was full of an orange sunset as the young couple took their places *vis-à-vis*, and Joan proceeded to inaugurate the new brown teapot. She poured out tea with Henry in her lap, and he made conversation easy and intimate by occasionally clambering into the tray, and exhibiting other manifestations of a budding character of greediness and push.

Meanwhile, Manoo, the grave-eyed bearer, stood at attention in the doorway, whilst the cook and his

matey, from a convenient angle, kept an interested watch on host and guest. As if by mutual consent, these said but little of their recent experience—there was no need to repeat or compare their poignant sensations. Death on the white horse had been within a few strides of them an hour ago ; they had escaped with their lives ; and it were best not to dwell on the past—memory was too vivid, too raw ; by mutual consent they endeavoured to thrust it from them, and drive their thoughts into other channels. Nevertheless, as the result of their joint escape they were aware of a reciprocal fellowship, comradeship—friendship.

They discussed tennis tournaments, books, and plays, a commemoration at Oxford, and their several journeys out.

'I fancy that after England this jungle life must be a curious experience for *you*,' said Trafford, looking steadily at the little aristocrat across the table—aristocrat to her finger-tips.

'Well, yes,' she admitted ; 'but one gets accustomed to everything in time.'

'As eels do to skinning ?'

'That is a fallacy—no one has heard the eel's point of view, and please do not suppose that I am a skinned eel !'

'Oh, I say, Miss Hampton !' he expostulated, in a tone of energetic protest ; 'you know I didn't mean that !'

'I love India—it has opened my eyes, given me a wider outlook, and I like the natives, and I adore these solemn magnificent woods, and faint, far-away plains.'

Her eyes as she spoke wandered across the river, to the amphitheatre of distant blue hills, then back to the forest's arched vista, and the silent grandeur of their wild surroundings.

'It is all so real and so peaceful—as if no kind of trouble could ever find one !'

Trafford recalled a recent scene, when he had found her sitting in the forest's very heart, a forlorn figure of grief and despair, encompassed by troubles in the form of bills, and made no reply. Evidently she divined his thoughts, as colouring faintly she said—

' You know so much already, I must tell you more. I am not unhappy—oh, please, do not think it; it is only that sometimes I find it hard to do battle with circumstances.'

' We all find that a bit of a tussle.'

' You see, I was brought up by connections of my father's, and when my old cousins died, I was only too glad to come out to mother. I had always understood that she was well off, and I was of course surprised to find that—' she faltered for a moment, half-choked, ' that—things were different. As I have already told you, they are all like children where money is concerned; they really *cannot* keep it.'

' You, however, can, Miss Hampton, and that is their one chance. If I may presume to offer you advice—be firm and hold the purse in your own hands.'

' Yes, it is the only thing to do—but—' and a look of genuine distress dawned in her eyes, ' it does seem so dreadful to refuse money to one's own mother.'

' You must harden your heart,' and he nodded his head impressively.

It was plain to her, as she glanced at his firm mouth and chin, that, as far as Mr. Trafford was concerned, 'hardening his heart' would be a very simple process.

' Do you think this new venture of Mr. Castellas will come to any good?' he inquired, after a pause.

' I should not like to discourage him,' she replied, ' but he plunged into this scheme far too suddenly; there was no road to Dhona, and no water, when he

set up his perfume-works. The expenses are heavy and, as far as I can see—and I help with the accounts—the profits are nil.'

' Yet it is a splendid idea,' said Trafford, ' when you come to think of it; the Orientals are wonderful people for perfumes. What a market he could open up! '

' That is true, and Mr. Castellas always seems to strike out brilliant ideas, and they either flicker away, or other less clever, but hard-headed, practical people, suck his brains, and steal his discoveries. For instance, a jute-mill which he started with new improvements, that all but ruined him, is now paying splendidly, and making his supplanter's fortune. He is too dreamy and sanguine—and generous.'

' The artistic temperament, of which, thank Heaven, I have not a grain! '

' I am sure I have many grains,' she said. ' I love the land of dreams, but just now I'm too busy to take many trips there. I help a little at the distillery.'

' You do—and what is the process? '

' *Horrible!*' and she laughed. ' Quantities of the blossoms are collected in baskets and put into a big vat alternately—think of it!—with layers of fat. This somehow preserves the very essence and juice of the flower, when the heat sends it through the retort into another receptacle. The fat is subsequently drawn off and makes pomade, and the scent is labelled and bottled. Such is the treatment, in a rough outline.'

' Yes, I understand; and I suppose the wages and carting and material come to a considerable sum per week? '

' Oh, a dreadful drain, and of course, the coolies must be paid promptly, also the furnace man, and the baboo, or they would all leave; and it's such a difficult business to find the ready money.'

' And what about the market? '

' Only a few dozen bottles a week latterly; and

the sales dropping. There must be some flaw in the process, for at times the perfume is quite abominable, not a scent, but an *odour*—even the coolies complain! But Mr. Castellas is endeavouring to remedy this.'

Trafford was silent; he mentally believed the 'C.P.' 'odour' would probably go from bad to worse, and he felt acute pity for this pretty fragile girl who sat at the other side of the table.

'I noticed two photographs in your room,' she said; 'I looked at them. One is such a beautiful woman—and the other is a girl.'

'Yes, my mother and my sister, Milly.'

'Your mother!' she repeated incredulously.

'Oh yes; every one exclaims—"Your *mother*!" She looks so young.'

'I am sure she would be very unhappy if she knew you had such a lonely post as this.'

'No,' he answered deliberately; 'I don't suppose she would mind—one way or the other.'

Miss Hampton gazed at him in unqualified surprise.

'Since you have told me your family secrets,' he continued gravely, 'I think I am bound to tell you one in return.'

Miss Hampton nodded; her eyes were expressive of interest and sympathy.

'My mother does not care about me; it took me a long while to learn this—but I have got the lesson by heart. She does not care for any one but herself—you see she is made that way, and cannot help it! She was born so!'

'Then I am better off, my mother is fond of me; but perhaps you are mistaken—some people have deep feelings which they never show. No, not even if they try!'

'Unfortunately there is no mistake. My mother has no feelings to display; possibly that is why she looks so young. When I was dangerously ill at school, and they thought I was booked—she could

not come to me because it was Ascot week ; and even when I started for India she did not see me to say good-bye, but sent a shilling wire from a shooting lodge in Scotland. Now, on the other hand, Milly, my sister, is *all* heart. She has, if anything, more than her rightful share, a cruel act or a cab-horse dropping dead will upset her for days ; and as for her friends, she would give all she possessed and think it nothing ! We used to plan that she was to come out and live with me, as soon as she grew up, and I was settled ; but I am afraid Pahari would be trying her rather high—and I believe I 'm stuck here for two years.'

' But do let me look round,' said Joan, rising ; ' perhaps another girl could judge for you. May I ? '

' I shall be only too grateful,' he answered eagerly.

As they entered the sitting-room together, Trafford explained that he would get a piano, and arm-chairs, and bookcase.

' Yes, and a nice bright chintz,' she added ; ' and colour the walls white, and hang pretty cheerful prints. You might put the piano across that corner,' she said, standing and pointing ; ' and I *think* a sofa would just fit along that wall. Really, with some flowers and books and dogs,' dandling Henry (who was somewhat distended in figure and half-asleep), ' the place would be quite gay. And I see you have another room. May I look ? ' and she stood on the threshold of the chamber of horrors, and glanced within. ' Well, no,' turning slowly round, ' I must admit that there is nothing gay about that. I—I cannot explain, but now and then I take a dislike to places. Please—please *don't* laugh at me, but there is something uncanny in the atmosphere of that apartment ; but of course,' she added, ' you are not foolish like me, and you could give your sister your room and sleep there,' and she moved away into the verandah.

As she stood gazing out towards the forest, it seemed to Trafford that the mere presence of this good,

innocent, unselfish girl in some way ejected an evil, brooding presence—and hallowed the entire bungalow.

Before her departure he brought her a cheque in an envelope and said, with a nervous smile—

'I've only made it out for four hundred—but, honour bright, Sirdar is worth more.'

'I am perfectly satisfied,' she answered, with a business-like air, putting the envelope and contents into her pocket, 'and I only hope'—her voice became suddenly husky—'that you will be as good friends as he and I have always been.'

Presently Trafford, riding Gehazi, preceded by a syce carrying a rifle and a lantern, accompanied Miss Hampton through the forest on her way home; the moon had risen, but the woods were dark—save here and there where the light, filtering through the almost impenetrable mass of verdure, fell in broken patches on the grassy track. When within a mile of the border, and well separated from the danger zone, the two parted.

'This has been a most eventful day,' she said. 'I have sold Sirdar, been chased by the celebrated wounded buff, and penetrated to Pahari. I've also been extremely silly. Please forget that, Mr. Trafford, but,' holding out her hand, she added tremulously, 'I shall always, always remember your kindness. Good-bye.'

Then turning about she gave Sirdar his head, and cantered away on Trafford's new pony.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE RULE OF TRAFFORD

THE new bearer, Manoo, proved to be a capable man accustomed to the straits and hand-to-mouth expedients of jungle households; at Pahari

forest bungalow various new chairs, tables, and cooking-pots had appeared, a larger staff of servants, a flock of (temporarily) delighted ducks were quacking and swimming in the rain-pools, and a young, noisy, and insatiably hungry parrot hung in the verandah in a bazaar cage. The pup Henry, who was the baby of the establishment, engrossed a flattering amount of affection and attention—though he once suffered the indignity of being all but carried off by a hawk! Altogether, the premises were changed, and exhibited a surprising amount of bustle and life.

Trafford felt a different individual; it seemed to him as if the visits of Scruby and Miss Hampton—especially of Miss Hampton—had left a beneficent impression on the atmosphere; this might, of course, be a wild, mad idea, but the sensations of intense depression, apathy, and—to be quite plain with himself—horror, which had at first encompassed him, had been dispersed.

The night after he had escorted Miss Hampton to the forest's edge, though every fibre throbbed with physical fatigue, he felt curiously elated, in extraordinarily good spirits, and sat down and penned a short and enthusiastic letter to his mother, announcing his arrival and address. He also dispatched a note or two to friends, a scrawl to his sister, and retiring to bed with Henry, slept the undisturbed sleep of the weary and the just.

The new Forest Officer began his work in earnest, and the next day he flung himself into his task with enthusiasm; at an early hour he was out on inspection, escorted by a smart young official called Ambado, who spoke a little English, and seemed eager to learn his business. (Ambado eventually became a trusted foreman and right hand.) Mr. Beaufort was senior, but Trafford had taken his measure; he belonged, for all his courteous genuflexions and unctuous expressions, to another type;

roguey was inscribed on his bland and smiling visage: moreover, he was behind the times; his talk, his explanatory sentences that conveyed nothing but words—words—words—were a mist designed to conceal his absolute indolence, ignorance, and incapacity. He and the young Conservator had several sharp differences of opinion respecting certain grants of grazing and woodcutting that had been allowed to villagers.

The Reserve, too, was in a shockingly neglected condition for want of felling, removing dead and rotten trees, replanting and burning. It seemed to this active and conscientious new-comer, as he looked about, questioned, and rode hither and thither (yes, he could do with three ponies), and attempted sweeping reforms, that the clearing of the Augean stables was a holiday task compared to the one that lay before *him*. Trafford realized his responsibilities; he was aware that a struggle was imminent, and the conviction of this gave a certain force and elevation to his character. He no longer looked a mere boy in his teens, but a serious official with the cares of a great district on his shoulders.

Then as to game. There was no doubt whatever of the ravages of the poacher, and the enormities of the horn-hunter. All this would, and should, be ended—and not from a selfish or personal motive—put down with a firm hand. Whoever was caught killing game without a licence would be heavily fined and punished.

'I shall put poaching out of fashion,' thought this sanguine youth. 'When a poacher finds that heads are too costly, he will soon let the forest alone!' He gathered his guards and employés together near the bungalow, and standing bare-headed on the verandah, as in a pulpit, made them his first speech in halting but vigorous language. The crowd stood below, transfixed in silence and amazement. Did this well-favoured young sahib with the bright

eyes, with, as one might say, ‘the milk still on his lips,’ think that *he* could alter the forest customs, and combat the wood and game ‘dustoor’? After all, were not the wood, and grass, and creatures, and the money to be made thereof, the property of those who lived upon the land as their forefathers had done for thousands of years?

They listened with true Eastern courtesy, salaamed and replied with one accord—

‘*Ap ki kushi!*’ (Since it is the will of the Protector of the Poor, so be it!) But some of the older shikaris looked at one another curiously; and Kakor, the chief of these, and rich with the spoils of tiger-skins and horns, said to his colleagues—

‘Of a surety, he does not know that Beaufort is of *us*—and with Beaufort is another. He may talk and order and upbraid—but truly he is helpless—and the voice of the people is God’s drum! ’

Therefore it was in the nature of a sensation when, three weeks later, the news ran in and around the forest that Beaufort had been dismissed. The clear-headed Trafford—who never muddled his brains with ‘whisky schrab’—spent one or two wet days in going over books, and examining accounts, and had discovered several inexplicable matters—in short, ‘serious defalcations. Mr. Beaufort was summoned to his presence, and the servants, who listened attentively, subsequently announced, ‘There was much loud talk, but the young sahib was too strong—oh, he was very strong, and Beaufort, so fierce and angry at first, had at last fallen on his knees and wept like a butcha (baby), and departed afterwards on his pony with his head hanging low, and bowed with grief.’

Yes, Beaufort was dismissed. A prompt correspondence settled this matter with headquarters, and Stenhouse grinned as he showed a report to his secretary.

‘I didn’t believe the chap had it in him! I

thought he was one of your kid-glove fellows ; but I see he is a man after my own heart, and can exercise his judgment, and administrative functions. Short, sharp, decisive is the word ! I was afraid the job there would be too big for him, but, by George ! he is going to make his subordinates sit up, and is ready to fight the whole crowd of plundering, thieving rascals !'

'Yes,' agreed his secretary, handing back the letter, 'his reports are wonderfully lucid, for such a beginner. Evidently he comes of a fighting caste—I see he is an enthusiast.'

'An enthusiast !' cried Stenhouse. 'God forbid !'

'Yes ; you, I know, agree with that fellow who said, *Surtout, pas de zèle*. For my part, I admire a little *zèle*, and I'd like to know where our British Empire would be without it ?'

'Ah, well, the British Empire is a long way from a thieving forest baboo. I see Trafford asks for a small pension—as the rascal has spent twenty-three years in successfully plundering the Government, I expect his pockets are pretty heavy ; but I suppose he must have it, and the business be hushed up, otherwise matters may be awkward—and Trafford find himself in a nest of hornets.'

'That Beaufort chap should be sent to the Andamans !'

'Of course—but instead, he will live near the scene of his successes, and be the backer—or rather leader—of the poachers, who will now fight Trafford tooth and nail.'

'It's rather rough on the boy,' muttered the secretary.

'It is, I grant you ; but it will be fine practice, and harden him for the big battle of life.'

'Poor chap ! Pahari is a beastly hole, and with all the forest against him, man and beast ! I would not be in his shoes for something—certainly not for his pay, three hundred and eighty rupees a month !'

But Stenhouse was already engrossed in another correspondence, and made no reply.

The news of Beaufort's fall flew through the Bandi, and was handed on as a sort of fiery cross from village to village; it even penetrated to the Club at Chandi, where Heron, as he settled himself down to bridge, said—

'I say, you fellows! . Have you heard that that new chap Trafford is raising no end of a dust in his department—chucking out old hands, and setting his house in order with a vengeance ? '

Maguire and the doctor were too much engrossed in sorting their cards to be interested, but Gresham, with a cigarette in his mouth and a sneer on his face, mumbled the words, ' New Broom ! '

Gresham's acquaintances were figuratively divided into two columns, ' Profit and Loss.' This recent arrival undoubtedly came under the head of ' Loss.' Publicly he liked Trafford. ' Such a rare nice chap! So unaffected, and good-looking!' Privately, he hated him; and for three weighty reasons. Firstly, because he had in a way ousted him from the Zoo—where he had looked upon the comfortable little spare room as his own. Now, since Trafford and Scruby were such pals, he never knew when his quarters would be empty! Reason the second: it was noised abroad that Trafford had the refusal of Joan Hampton's pony—an animal he had intended for his own riding. He proposed to buy for four, sell the Sirdar to the Rajah for eight hundred rupees—and borrow him on every occasion. So Trafford had indirectly done him out of a considerable sum of money, and a ripping good mount. Thirdly and lastly, Trafford was playing the very devil in the forest! The shikaris and horn-hunters were frightened and idle, all ' business ' was at a standstill: Haman was furious, for he had quantities of orders, and many impatient and clamouring customers.

Trafford found time to pay his promised visit to the Kennedys; but a flock of tents pitched under the cork and tamarind trees, and groups of gaily dressed ladies and flannel-clad men, scared him away; after a short colloquy with the Kennedys butler, he was riding off, when Mrs. Kennedy caught sight of him, and came hurrying to greet him.

' You are not going—oh, how shameful ! '

' Yes, I 'm not got up for Society, you see, and I 'll come again when you are all alone. I will indeed '

' Now please get down at once,' she said authoritatively. ' If you don't, Dick will be so angry, I assure you—he will indeed.'

' But just look at me ! Mrs. Kennedy,' he expostulated—' flannel shirt, muddy leggings, and jungle kit.'

' I 'd no idea you were so vain.'

' I 'm not ; only I like to do credit to my first friend in India.'

' Well, do get off for five minutes, have some "cup," and let your pony have bran and water.'

' All right, thank you, but I really must rot detain you. I 'll get back—Gehazi is posted half-way.'

' Oh, wait a few minutes. They are all engaged. Badminton and three sets of tennis. We have one of your neighbours with us—Mr. Scruby. He came round by rail. And how do you get on ?'

' Pretty well, thanks to the start you gave me. Mr. Kennedy was right. Tell him that I had good reason to be sorry for *not* remaining here a night or two. However, now I 've got my work commenced, and I 've been in to Chandi.'

' Have you ? I 've not travelled so far for years. What is it like now ? '

' Rather a pretty place, with well-kept roads and gardens, and a nice little Club.'

' And the people ? '

' They are not just the simple, spoon-fed community you imagine,' he answered, with a broad

smile. ‘*They* know all about bridge and champagne ! No better, and no worse, than the rest of us. And now I must be off—I ’ll ride over again before long.’

In six weeks Trafford had made several agreeable excursions into the station, stayed with Scruby, played tennis and billiards at the Club, visited Mrs. Castellas, and dined with Mrs. Heron. Mrs. Heron accorded him a flattering welcome ; her manner was almost sisterly, as she inquired after his doings, his domestics, and his welfare. During dinner, Mr. Heron also asked pertinent questions respecting the district—the probable output of wood, the quantity of sâl and teak, and the all-important matter of transport. He was agreeably surprised to find that this good-looking boy knew his trade, and had quite an acute business instinct.

‘So I hear you are working tremendous reforms among the forest folk ?’ he said.

‘Well, I ’m doing my best.’

‘Gresham was talking about it in the Club. He thinks you are making a most tremendous mistake.’

‘I am afraid I don’t set any value on Mr. Gresham’s opinion of forestry,’ rejoined Trafford stiffly. His suspicions of this gentleman had been aroused ; he almost believed that Gresham was the power behind Beaufort, and Heron glancing at the young Forest Officer gathered that war had been declared between the houses of Gresham and Trafford !

After dinner, when the lights were low, and Tom Heron was dozing over a cheroot in the verandah, Mrs. Heron sang to their guest, seductive Spanish love songs, in the most exquisitely sweet voice it had ever been his good fortune to hear. The visitor had also been prevailed upon to sing ; he had a nice tenor, which his charming accompanist compared to Caruso’s. Flattered, elated, enraptured, he rode into the starlit night, with the sacred confidences of a low emotional contralto in his ears, and the thrilling pressure of a soft hand still tingling in his young veins.

'Let's look at you,' cried Scruby, as he sprang up the steps. 'I want to see your head—and if it's turned.'

'No; it's screwed on a good bit tighter than you'd think.'

'So you had a jolly evening?'

'Rather! Mrs. Heron sang—oh, ye gods, what a voice!'

'The voice of the charmer, isn't it? I give her her voice—a most effective—lure. She sang a lot of Spanish things, "A Creole Love Song," and "*Si vous n'avez rien à me dire*," I'll bet my bear!'

'I say, Scruby—you and I will never agree there.'

'No, she agrees with you—now. Take my word, she will disagree with you later.'

'What a bitter cynic you are! My good Gosling, what a terrible old man you'll be! Mrs. Heron was awfully kind, and is lending me books, and has asked me to come over and stay a week.'

'Oh yes, I know the programme, and bring your songs—and your ponies—and your sympathy—eh?'

'I refused, of course. I cannot get off for more than a Sunday; and, anyway, I told her I was pledged to you.'

'That's right!' said Scruby, nodding approval. 'It is not every young man who, after a dainty dinner, entralling company, and seductive songs, can turn his back on the Venusberg, and go forth into the cool and lonely forests.'

'Now look here, Scruby,' said Trafford, suddenly springing to his feet; 'if you and I are to be friends—you will never mention Mrs. Heron's name to me again.'

'What! Do you mean that?' stammered Scruby, for once completely taken aback.

'Yes, I do. Good night. I'm off at four o'clock in the morning.'

When Joan Hampton returned from her adventure

in the forest, and related what Gresham declared to be a 'cock-and-bull story' about a buffalo and Trafford, her family received the news with their usual apathetic placidity. Joan was often late and roaming, and she did not mind adventures,—or even dangerous animals. Twice she had killed snakes in the compound, and once she had thrown a verandah chair at a thing she *said* was a panther.

She cashed the price of Sirdar with the bazaar bunya, paid off the overhanging debt the day after her long ride, and when the frugal midday meal of dâl curry and fruit fritters was over, followed her mother to her room. Mrs. Castellas, in a loose blue wrapper, was busily engaged in putting her scanty fringe into pins, and preparing to enjoy her usual siesta. On the bed lay a parcel, just arrived by 'Value paid, parcel post.' It contained many yards of white spangled material, some white satin, and a pair of dancing shoes.

'Mother, I 've come for the money for the servants' wages—forty rupees. You know they are two weeks overdue, and the syce is owed for oil and gram.'

'Oh, laws me, Joan, they can wait!' exclaimed Mrs. Castellas, turning round, and gesticulating with her ugly little hands. 'You cannot get money where there is none, nor blood out of a stone. I have not one *pice*!' and, with an air of finality, she tucked herself on to a cane couch, and drew her draperies around her.

'But, mother dear, the forty rupees for the little yellow cow?' urged the housekeeper.

'I 've just paid it to the bangy-wallah. See'—indicating the bed—'it 's for Lily's dress. There is to be a ball in the Club later, and the poor darling has nothing—nothing! How can you expect a girl of her age and beauty to stand aside, and see all the fun and all the life go past her? Can you, dearie?' and she looked up at Joan with a pair of plaintive and searching eyes.

But Joan was silent.

' You are so different,' pursued her mother. ' You are much older—you do not care, and you are so wise and steady ; but if Lily does not get what she wants, you see how she weeps, and frets, and will not eat, and is so miserable ; and when she is miserable, I am more than miserable—so there it is ! You know, dear, we must try and make a little effort for the poor darling.'

Joan took a turn about the room ; then she went over to the bed and examined the pretty spangled stuff, the satin, and the shoes. All the time she was thinking ; she must speak plainly to her mother, more plainly than she had ever done, and be firm and unmoved by tears. How she hated her task ! But unless they were all to be driven forth as beggars, she was called upon to make a stand. There was—as far as she knew—nothing but her one hundred a year between them and utter destitution. The factory did not pay—and never would pay—and careful as she was of every crumb and bone, her mother brought in guests constantly, and offered pegs (with whisky at four rupees a bottle). The doctor, poor man, was not a spender ; indeed he was sorely in need of new boots, and a coat—but Lily was incessantly pleading and clamouring for clothes—for pretty frocks—for money for novelettes and sweets—and her mother, who could never refuse her, went on credit wherever it could be obtained. Then came the bills, which *she* had to face. The price of poor Sirdar had gone to settle a long-overdue account to a firm in Calcutta for stores and drapery, and this squandering of the cow money was positively the last straw. Some would have abandoned the task, and returned home ; but Joan was attached to her weak, faded little mother, who clung to her as to a lifebuoy. Indeed she was aware that all the family fastened upon her in this character. As she stood by the bed, she was considering and making

up her mind, and recalling the advice of her new acquaintance.

At last she went over, sat down beside her mother on the matted floor, and took her helpless little hand in hers. Mrs. Castellas started—she had been half asleep.

‘What is it?’ opening her eyes—‘a visitor?’

‘No; I want to have a little serious talk with you, mother.’

‘Oh, dearie, not now. I am so sleepy,’ and she closed her eyes as if to dismiss all outside worries, and the troublesome world.

‘Yes, now please—it’s about money.’

‘Oh, laws me! how I hate money talk!’ and Mrs. Castellas’s tone was querulous.

‘But, dear mother, do think—without money, we should starve, or go into the Friend in Need Society—or some refuge place for poor Whites.’

Mrs. Castellas dragged away her hand, with a gesture of indignation.

‘You see, dear, we have no income,’ persisted her tormentor, in a coaxing voice.

‘Your hundred a year is certain, anyhow.’

‘It is barely enough to pay for mere food, and there is rent, and clothes, and light, and the servants’ wages.’

‘A set of thieves—they live on us!’

‘They are so poor, their wages are low, and behind-hand. The rent is owing for more than two years. Then there have been great debts—many are still owing—I have sold my pony.’

‘What! My goodness! Sold your pony?’ sitting up with a jerk.

‘Yes; I had no choice. Chutter-je Huckerjee would have sent down a process server this week to claim the furniture.’

‘Oh, what a brute! What a *pig*! But I do not see why you should have sold your pony—it will make talk—and your father is bound to bring off this scheme.’

'Poor man, I wish he might, but how can he? He has no capital, no market; the road too is so bad. He has now only a few coolies working.'

'But he says Gresham is talking about getting up a company, and the Rajah will take shares. Oh yes, Gresham will certainly help.'

'No; he never helps any one but himself, and we must help ourselves, and cut down all expenses.'

'Expenses! Oh, my dearie, you do make me laugh!' and she smoothed her daughter's hair.

'The Club subscription—ten rupees a month—guests, wine, whisky, tinned stores, hams—all very expensive. We must live as frugally as natives. We do,—when alone.'

'But I cannot have Gresham and Chapman and the Bright boys and girls here, and offer nothing.'

'Oh yes. Every one knows how hospitable you have been always. You must live on your reputation.'

'I think I would rather die,' she wailed, 'than not be able to offer a cup of tea.'

'But do please listen, mother. It's not merely a cup of tea—it's seldom that. It's, "You must stay for a few days—you must dine—you must lunch."

'Well, I've always done it,' she exclaimed passionately, 'ever since I married Castellas. Of course your own father was different. We never saw company, except a few of his friends, stupid elderly men, literary people like himself; but when we did entertain, everything was of the very best. For the last few years, when his health was failing, we never had a soul. I'll allow he was a refined, gentlemanly man, so quiet and kind—but twenty-five years older than I was.'

'Then I wonder he married! My grandmother was his housekeeper, wasn't she?'

'Yes, she was, and no better. She knew his family all her life, and was most superior, and so strict. She brought me there when I was twenty,

and Mr. Hampton—and—and—well—after all, I was *very* pretty, he was a man—and my mother was dead set on the match—so there it was ! ’

‘ My father had a large fortune ? ’

‘ Oh yes ; for a writer he was rich, and left his money, as you know, to me, saying something nice, that I might enjoy it, and my life and youth, and be a good mother to you. He gave instructions about your education, and said you were to go to school. He was so awful particular, always correcting the way I talked and pronounced words. He would not let me say “ *okard* ” for awkward, or “ *Whatever is it ?* ” or “ *Oh, laws !* ”—you see I don’t forget. Gresham says my English is *so* pure ! ’

‘ But, mother, we have wandered a long way from our present business. I want you in future to promise me you will invite no guests to dine or lunch or visit, run no bills whatever, here or elsewhere—and leave all the money troubles on my shoulders.’

‘ Oh dear, oh dear, then we shall have a poor time ! ’ and Mrs. Castellas began to weep, and wring her hands.

‘ We have no choice,’ urged the girl, standing up as she spoke.

‘ Why not ? ’ argued her mother. ‘ The people here are all so kind. The doctor—or Mr. Maguire—would feel it a compliment if you asked them to lend us a few hundred rupees. I am sure they would do it for you—they would not say no to *you*—just until the distillery begins to pay. I believe in it, I do—and so does Otto.’

‘ How many, many schemes have you both believed in, dearest mother ? Think’—counting on her fingers—‘ the jute mill——’

‘ Oh, we lost thousands ! ’

‘ The coal mine—the jam factory—the newspaper—the milk farm—and now *this* ! ’

‘ That is true—all quite true—but such bad luck

cannot last, and Otto is so clever—something will repay him—look how hard he works.'

'Yes, indeed, but he is not sufficiently practical or hard-hearted to ensure success. Well, mother, what about your promise? *Won't* you help me?' There was a touch of pathos in her voice as she uttered her request.

'Oh, it is so hard to say! If we draw in now, I have to consider poor darling Lily, and her chances. Chapman is just crazy about her; he comes here only to see her—and so does Captain Gresham—he worships the child, does the Captain. Yes, he would be a good match. Maybe a little old, but, I do always say, the grand gentleman, and in such a fine position too, and the child likes him.'

'Yes, I'm afraid she does. Oh, mother, I cannot endure Mr. Gresham. He is a selfish, hard man. I am positive he has no idea of marrying Lily, or any one else—he comes here for a convenience.'

'Now what nonsense you are talking!' interrupted Mrs. Castellas, with rising colour. 'Send the young men away that admire your pretty sister; give up company, and the Club; hand the money over to you, and leave you to rule us, as you please. No, never, never, never, never!' she concluded breathlessly.

Joan stood silent during this tirade; burning words were on her lips, tears in her eyes. She felt helpless. After a long silence, she said very gravely—

'Then, mother—there is only one thing to be done, I must leave you. I cannot bear to stay, and witness all the misery that is approaching, and which I can see so distinctly. Misery for Lily, if she cares for Mr. Gresham; misery for you and father, in the way of money difficulties. I will give you fifty pounds a year, and since I may not interfere, you must go your own way; and I only hope and pray that I may be wrong—and that I am as much too pessimistic as you are too optimistic.'

'Joan!'—throwing her arms round her—'I don't understand your grand words, and I won't understand that you want to leave us. Laws me, what should we do without you? I may have been foolish—I know I am silly—your father always said so—but I can see that you are to us just a rock of strength'; and she clung to her daughter as if she really were what she declared her to be. Subsequently, there were many tears, and a compromise. Joan yielded the Club subscription—ten rupees a month. Mrs. Castellas, on her side, agreed to no balls, no guests, and that Joan was to be the money-holder. Joan granted tea-parties, and a little cash for finery and sweets; so, after all, the conference ended peacefully, and Mrs. Castellas, feeling vaguely that she had got rid of a heavy burden, and accomplished a virtuous deed, was rewarded with a cup of coffee, and with a contented sigh resumed her interrupted siesta.

## CHAPTER XII

## JOAN

WHEN Joan, with all the honours of conquest, retired to her dreary little room under the musty thatch, there was nothing of the victor in her port. She felt exhausted and dull as she sank wearily into a chair, and stared out upon the pale green rice plains with an expression of hopeless dejection. Two years of an enervating climate, and a heart-breaking struggle, had sapped spirit and vitality, and the late conflict had left her completely prostrated. The day was still and oppressive; the ceaseless drone and buzz of insects filled the air with a drowsy murmur; a bank of murky clouds hung above the distant line of forests, and the prospect

was sombre and sad ; an immense melancholy crept over the girl, which seemed to correspond with her gloomy and depressing outlook.

When her mother had practically abandoned her, and departed to the East, Joan was left at school (as a liberally-paid-for Indian child) ; her early holidays were spent with two maiden ladies, her father's cousins, sole members of the Hampton family who would acknowledge or receive the housekeeper's granddaughter.

Miss Theresa and Miss Mary Hampton lived in a red-brick Georgian mansion on the outskirts of a prosperous town in Yorkshire. It stood amidst pleasant, old-fashioned grounds, secluded within high walls. The occupants had but a life interest in 'the Gables,' and their income died with them. Meanwhile they kept up a certain amount of state, read prayers (alternately) to five staid indoor servants and a venerable coachman, issued invitations to one annual garden party, and never, in all their lives, visited in the town. Too proud to acknowledge the Town, too old and uninteresting to be welcome in the County, the Misses Hampton of the Gables were somewhat in the position of the coffin of Mahomet, between earth and heaven. However, besides the poor—two interests were always with them, their garden and their pedigree. Herbaceous borders and 'the Wars of the Roses' were their favourite topics. They addressed one another as 'Sister' in speaking, and when Sister Theresa suggested that Ludovic Hampton's orphan should be countenanced and received, to this Sister Mary eagerly agreed, declaring that 'since Fop, the old Blenheim, was dead, a child would be a nice new pet.'

Joan was five when she paid her first visit to the Gables ; a timid little dark-haired creature, terribly afraid of the tall old ladies with bobbing grey curls, the big echoing house and its slippery oak staircase. The small slender creature looked lost in the huge

four-poster when Lizzie, the kind-hearted housemaid, came to console her—and brought, as an introduction, a slice of bread and butter, covered with delicious brown Demerara sugar. Soon the old women grew accustomed to the child, and the child to them ; her shrill young voice, and her quick pattering footsteps, enlivened the staid and silent Gables. She fed the poultry and the canaries with Sister Theresa ; weeded the garden, and killed wasps with Sister Mary ; and was early educated in the pedigree of the family and the glories of their race. Now and then, after a silent survey, Sister Theresa would piously exclaim—

‘ Thank God, Sister Mary, the child is a Hampton ! There is not a trace of Skeggs. Look at her nose, her ears, her fingers, and her feet ! ’

And so, from the age of five, it was impressed upon Joan that it was a noble birthright to be born a Hampton. A Hampton had fought at Cressy, had been present at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Hamptons were always of importance : they had entertained princes, and even kings. Alas, extravagance had been their bane ; in this very house, a Hampton had gambled away many wide acres, not only betting on cards, but on pats of butter flung up against the chaste dining-room ceiling. The reigning Hamptons of Hampton Place were still people of acknowledged position, and the sovereigns of Sisters Mary and Theresa. They owned an historical home, valuable pictures, and heirlooms ; graciously dispatched game and Christmas cards to their venerable cousins, and thereby made the hearts of these glad within them.

Joan had been educated to look down upon the Town, and desired to remember, that her ancestors had been Crusaders when Mudford was a marshy swamp ; she took very readily to this intelligence—for such, after all, is human nature !

As time advanced, and the old ladies declined in

years, their niece became more prominent in the household. At eighteen she left school, a fairly well-educated, accomplished, and popular girl. She now ordered dinner and the carriage, gave out stores, was consulted in the choice of library books, introduced new chintz covers in the drawing-room, and even palms and lamp-shades. The neighbourhood had become alive to the existence of a young and very pretty Miss Hampton. She was a capital tennis player, and made a sensation at the Hunt Ball. Miss Joan was 'County,' and had a musical laugh, wore a French frock, and an air of distinction. The sisters, who were warmly congratulated by the wife of the Lord-Lieutenant of the Shire and the Duchess of Lincoln, had not felt so proud and uplifted for years !

The fame of niece Joan spread to Hampton Place, and the great magnates lent a favourable ear to the praises of their namesake and cousin, and even vouchsafed to extend the sceptre. She was commanded for a three days' visit ; and this, such was her success, was prolonged for three weeks, and might have been three months, but for the serious indisposition of Miss Theresa which summoned her home. It proved to be a long and lingering illness, and for nearly a year Joan was both housekeeper and nurse, and finally the comforter of unhappy Cousin Mary, who followed her sister to the family vault within ten days, and Joan found herself alone, not merely in the big old house, but in the world. The two old cousins had nothing to bequeath except one hundred a year, their personal effects, and the framed pedigree. The girl was in a way her own mistress with the said hundred a year, some moth-eaten furs, musty books, mended lace, and two or three fine miniatures.

The Hamptons, who had no daughter of their own, offered Joan a home : they were really anxious to adopt her, this true Hampton, with the family features and characteristics—plus a cool head and

a warm heart ; but as she was deliberating, a letter came summoning her to India.

Joan had idealized this far-away parent—faintly remembered as fair, pretty, and always dressed in pale blue—who had loaded her with presents of Indian bangles, embroideries, and Guava jelly, and sent her gushing, ill-spelt letters. She had cherished a desire to see the mystic East, a craving to know her mother, and threw in her lot with her without an hour's hesitation.

The Hamptons were mortally offended : the girl could not be a real Hampton, thus to turn her back on the home of her ancestors, and to travel out to live with Mrs. Castellas—her mother certainly—but a vulgar, foolish little person of low birth and no education—who was actually married to a black man !

Joan arrived at Chandi overflowing with hope, affection, and an eager capacity for happiness and life, bringing the dainty outfit and refined ideas of a well-bred girl who had never known the lack of money, never brushed her own skirts, made her clothes, or undertaken any housework. Oh, what a change awaited her ! By swift degrees, she realized the miserable existence into which she had plunged. The squalor and untidiness, the soiled tablecloths, the men in the verandah with bills, the mean little shifts and bold begging hints of her parent—who was always open-handed and hospitable—at the expense of the bazaar ! Then Lily—her half-sister—what a strange girl !—ignorant, stubborn, and crudely violent in her emotions ; so self-indulgent, and vain. Joan tried to induce her to read with her, to sew, or to learn a little French. ‘ My goody me ! Whatt for ? ’ she demanded. ‘ We know no French people, and for historee ! Ah, bah ! give me only my *own* historee.’ No, Lily only cared to array herself in *voyant* colours, to eat sweets, to flirt, and to entertain Captain Gresham (to whom,

and his bold blue eyes, Joan had taken an invincible dislike). There was Mr. Castellas ; sanguine, hopeful, retiring ; ever experimenting, and of no real account in the *ménage*. Lily ruled her mother —she was the child of her love—and her mother ruled her husband. In his sight, she was still the beautiful, gracious Mrs. Hampton who had endowed him with her hand and fortune. With one consent the family now leaned upon Joan : here they were in complete accord ; indeed, a stranger would suppose, from the way in which the household affairs were abandoned to her, that Miss Hampton had been brought up in India, and that the Castellas were the new-comers. It was ‘Joan ! Joan ! Joan !’ all day long. ‘Joan, there is no gram ! Joan, will you write to Mrs. Heron ? Joan, come and do my hair ! Joan, the roof is leaking !’

Poor Joan had no friends, except Mrs. Baxter (the friend of all). Her sole pleasures were sketching, and riding through the forest with Mr. Castellas. Between these there existed a secret bond : he consulted her gravely, and imparted various little trade troubles and secrets that he would never dream of breathing to his wife or daughter ; and she wrote his letters, looked over his accounts, and gave him sympathy and encouragement. Sometimes, when fatigued with her perpetual efforts and the dead-weight of household responsibilities, Joan drew for herself contrasting pictures of what her life might have been—and what it was ! By her own deed, she had accepted what implied banishment and poverty, and had been cast out for ever from the august Hampton connection. What was to be her ultimate fate ? Would she die of malaria ? or would she lose her wits ? like a poor girl who, when Chandi was a big station, had gone mad, being crossed in love, and drowned herself in the old Chunan swimming-bath among the mango trees. Joan had only been crossed in life. She abhorred

her damp apartment, with its rickety furniture and patched ceiling-cloth, haunted by roof cats and rats. When at night she lay awake, listening to the scampering feet, the squeaks, the escapes, the frequent tragedies—the marks of which subsequently oozed through the canvas!—she recalled her lofty airy bedroom at the Gables, its chintz draperies, and valuable old furniture, Spode china, framed samplers, and delicious scent of potpourri—the dainty food, the walled garden, where everything grew in its own particular place—the low subdued voices, and cultivated talk. Here was noise, irregularity, squalor, complaints, discomfort, and Lily's piercing voice shrieking at the servants and dominating the entire premises.

Joan was conscious that she now existed, not for herself, but for others, and was weighed down with many cares, such as her mother's health, her stubborn extravagance, and the distillery accounts, which were painful reading (although Mr. Castellas said, ' Only give me time, and the C.P. scent will be known in every bazaar and zenana in the East'), the house-keeping bills, and Lily's follies. Oh, many a night she lay awake on her hard little charpoy, listening to the cats and rats scurrying overhead, vainly seeking to find some way out of her pressing and desperate difficulties.

Recently a new factor, Philip Trafford, had entered upon the scene. From the moment he had found her in the forest, she had felt attracted by him, not on account of his handsome face and well-bred appearance—no! but because in his character she felt confident there was something strong, reliable, and to be depended on. In England, they would have been on the same footing. There, she was Miss Hampton, the granddaughter of Sir Torrens Hampton, of Hampton Place, the equal of any one; here, although Mr. Trafford was but a junior official, he seemed to be on a far higher plane—seemed, and

was—because of her relations: her Eurasian step-father, her dark and undisciplined sister, her helpless, uneducated mother, who boasted of Joan's grand connections in a manner that caused her the most excruciating shame. Lately, he had dropped in once or twice, and sent game and books; and it was not Lily he came to see, for he and Lily did not 'get on.' (It was enough for Gresham to have called him 'a meddling, stupid, stuck-up ass,' for Lily to detest him.) Could it be to see her? Oh no, no; yet if his sister were to join him, in Miss Trafford she might find a friend—a companion of her own age and class, a girl educated in England, who did not sleep all the afternoon, eat pounds of cloying bazaar sweets, and greedily gossip with the native servants.

As Joan sat sewing—she was making a blouse for Lily—absorbed by her own thoughts, the storm had been steadily gathering. Suddenly there came a thunder-clap that shook the old bungalow to its foundations; this was immediately followed by a flash of blinding light, then the hiss of the rain sweeping across the plains in solid sheets, and descending on the plateau with a roar.

High above the noise of the elements, and the clapping of doors and shutters, she caught the scream of her mother's voice, calling, 'Joan! Joan! Joan!' If ever anything out of the common occurred, it was always, 'Joan! Joan! Joan!'

The rainy season had not yet come to an end, and Trafford found it extremely difficult to keep intrusive toads and reptiles out of his abode; he also was beginning to tire of the weary routine of the days, the deadly solitude of the nights, the drifting mists, raging streams, and turbid red river. Occasionally a dense white fog settled down upon the forest and Pahari, and to its inmate it sometimes seemed as if this had penetrated his very brain! Although he

still worked incessantly, he was feeling slack ; and no wonder, as he drank when in the forest beautifully clear, unfiltered water, and when at home slept in a malaria-poisoned atmosphere, with doors and windows wide, while the wood-owl moaned, bats whirled in and out, and flitting night-jars chorused their contemptuous '*Hoo ! Hoo ! Hoo !*'

The inexperienced new-comer little suspected that he had been seized upon by India's latest scourge, typhoid, and went about the woods with burning hands and a head as it were of molten lead. One evening he collapsed, and became delirious, and Manoo, his bearer, in a panic dispatched a coolie to Scruby with a chit, which ran as follows :—

' I beg your honour's favour, O exalted one. Trafford Sahib plenty sick—please Doctor sending—or soon, soon die.—Your servant, MANOO '

As the aboriginal Gond fled through the forests with the above in his loin-cloth (the national dress), Trafford tossed and muttered on his charpoy, whilst Henry whined in sympathy ; the night-jars sailed nearer and nearer, through the warm, throbbing darkness—their notes expressing a louder, and yet more triumphant '*Hoo ! Hoo ! Hoo !*'

## CHAPTER XIII

### AN ACCOUNT RENDERED

THE bearer's alarming note brought Scruby and the doctor post-haste to Pahari. Although they fought hard with the fever, for several days the patient's life was in imminent danger ; indeed, a rumour (fostered by Mr. Beaufort) ran through the Bandi, and into Karwassa, that the Forest Officer was dead ; but though he trembled on the verge of

the next world, Trafford eventually recovered, and was moved in a doolie to the house of his medical attendant, the indignant host declaring that 'the Pahari bungalow was a scandal and a disgrace—unfit for human habitation, a nest of malaria, and should be razed to the ground.' In short, he was so carried away as to quote, in sonorous tones, Milton's 'Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings, and the night-raven sings.'

Animated by anger and zeal and poetry, he lost no time in dispatching a forcible report to the proper quarter, and thenceforward Pahari was officially condemned.

Trafford's belongings—ponies, servants, pup and parrot—were transferred to a neat little house in Chandi, but he remained under the roof of his kind friend, a gaunt wreck with a shaven head, hollow eye-sockets, and dreadful skeleton hands. Although, like most undeniably handsome people, he had no personal vanity, he was a little sensitive about his appearance, and felt helplessly weak and languid, as with an effort he dragged himself back into everyday life.

There is no occasion to enlarge here upon the proverbial kindness of Anglo-Indian neighbours. When the patient was at his worst, Mrs. Kennedy came all the way from Karwassa, through twenty miles of jungle, in a rough country cart, to nurse the sick man, and almost on the doorstep she encountered nervous Mrs. Baxter, who had actually *ridden* from Chandi on the same errand.

The retinue and forest folk were profoundly impressed by the attention and anxiety bestowed on their sahib; yet, strange to say, Mrs. Heron made no sign—beyond sending a bottle of toilet vinegar, and some French novels—and even when Trafford was in the station she still neglected him. Like some—happily few—of her sex, she shrank instinctively from sick people, trouble, ugly sights, and the

miseries of daily life. Others were constant in their attentions—although Dr. Collins did not welcome many visitors for a patient who reclined in the verandah behind the green chicks, and was just beginning to take notice like a child.

'There has been a narrow escape of two mounds in that confounded pestilential compound,' he declared, 'and we are going slow. Maguire, with his loud bray, is strictly forbidden the house; so is Gresham, so is Heron. I'd bar out the Gosling with his hiss, but if I did—he'd make my life a burden. Mrs. Baxter and Mrs. Castellas are on the free list—especially the latter; her nice droning voice and her long-winded yarns are as good as a sedative, and will send the boy to sleep.'

Mrs. Castellas in faded finery (a pink muslin gown, and mildewed blue satin toque covered with crushed artificial roses) enjoyed sitting by Trafford, indulging in monologues, making tea and conversation, and feeling unusually important. She talked inconsequently and continuously, and related tedious narratives of her social triumphs, of how she had entertained the military, and once the secretary to the Lieutenant-Governor. The patient listened to her indefinite ramblings as if it were some one reading aloud; sometimes he attended, sometimes he did not; once she spoke of her first husband, Mr. Hampton, a man of good family though literary, who had a large detached house and grounds near Newark, and a walled garden, where he took exercise. He would have preferred to live in London, because of libraries and meetings and his club, she explained, but he was sickly, kept no company—even his family never visited him—they did not approve of his marriage—she was too young!

'He died,' she meandered on, 'when Joan—it's a family name—was three, and left me a widow. He bequeathed me everything, the place and furniture and about twenty thousand pounds.'

Trafford slowly opened his eyes, and looked at her incredulously.

'Yes, and it's all gone ! Aye ! I know, it's a poor tale ! He said he wished me to enjoy myself, and so I did. I wanted to see a bit of life. I'd never been up to London, or to a theatre, or had money to handle. I was just twenty-six ; so I sold off the house, and everything except the plate and books (they were willed to Joan), and after I had put off my weeds came up to town, and had a rare good time. Aye, it was just like another world ! I left Joan in the country, the town being so bad for young children, and I settled myself at a nice select boarding-house in Bloomsbury, and got pretty clothes and had a coupé of an afternoon, and drove about, and shopped, and went to theatres, and dined in restaurants, and made heaps of nice friends. I travelled on the Continent with some, and visited Switzerland and Ostend, and I'd several offers of marriage, but I was afraid they were after my bit of money—and I was not inclined to settle down.'

Trafford was languidly interested and puzzled. What had possessed this wealthy widow of a man of good family to marry Otto ?

'But you *did* settle ?' he corrected.

'Yes ; well, you see, it happened like this,' she began, with unction. 'I was back in my old quarters in Mrs. Porson's boarding-house, and one evening coming downstairs to dinner, what should I meet but a gentleman coming up. He stood aside to let me pass ; we just looked at one another—that was enough ! Something inside me said, 'There, Lucy Hampton—if ever you marry again—that's your husband !'

'Mr. Castellas ?'

'Yes, poor dear, he is changed like myself ! But then,'—now warming to her story,—'I declare to you, he was really the handsomest man in London. Of course, I'm not saying he'd be everybody's style ;

but he was mine, and he was adored in our circle—*all* the ladies were madly in love with him. He had well-cut features, a skin like ivory, beautiful dark eyes, and the air of a prince—yes, the air of a king !' Here she paused for a moment in order to meditate on the picture.

'Yes—go on,' urged her listener.

Only too delighted to oblige, she resumed, 'Well, we sat opposite at table, our eyes spoke for us—you know what I mean!—and we soon got acquainted. He was studying for the Medical, and had come to Porson's with a friend. It was truly a case of mutual love at first sight, and we got engaged. The Hamptons were terribly vexed, but as they never would know me, I did not care one brass pin. Our lawyer arranged about Joan, for of course I could not take her with me. Two old cousins of her father's promised to look to her, and as there was plenty of money, and nothing to wait for, and I was just craving to see India, we were married, and had a grand send-off from the boarding-house—though one of the maids stole my diamond brooch and earrings, and a silk gown, and only think I never missed them till I was out in Bombay. Oh, we had a splendid time, and Otto made loads of friends, and so did I. These were our good days—such good days ! Later on, first the jute failed, and then the paper, and so we gradually came down, and down, and here we are—these are our bad days.' She concluded with a hearty sigh.

'And Miss Hampton joined you ?'

'Yes, two years ago, and I 'm sure I don't know how we ever did without her ; so clear-headed, and clever and decided, just like Mr. Hampton, and always busy sewing or painting or housekeeping ; now Lily is as lazy as I am myself. Ha ! ha ! ha ! But Joan is fond of us all, and makes herself happy in spite of being accustomed to seven servants and a horse and brougham, and getting her dresses in

London. She is such a proud, determined little thing, though you might not think it to look at her! She can be quite *grand*. Mr. Hampton's mother was French, the daughter of a Marquis—"Marquee"—how do you call it? Anyway, the family were great swells—before their heads were cut off—and there's things Joan would sooner have *her* head cut off—than do!

Philip's mental eye instantly summoned up the picture of a girl with a proud little impassive face, her arms tied behind her, sitting in the tumbril, coldly unemotional, on her way to execution.

'But, after all, aren't I her own mother, and ain't she bound to do her best for *me*? Her proper place is here, and I must say she does sew, and make up lace, and cook lovely! Some day she may get married, though she is not like my Lily—now there's a fine figure for you!—and what hair! No, no, she's not like my Lil!'

'No,' he assented, with an inward 'Thank God!'

'My advice to my girls is this,' pursued Mrs. Castellas, waxing more and more confidential, 'Let the men talk to you about themselves, do you look pleasant, and throw in yes, and no, and why. They like the sound of their own voices, and go away quite proud of themselves; *never* try to teach a man, they don't want that—and don't look haughty in a ballroom. Men think you don't wish to dance with them; and if you grant a dance as a great favour—they won't come again!'

Further instructions were postponed by the arrival of a native with a paper in his hand, which he presented to Trafford with a profound salaam.

'Ah,' said Mrs. Castellas, catching sight of its import, 'a bill!' and she shuddered as if a scorpion had stung her.

'What's this?' inquired Trafford, resuming his everyday business-like air as he read aloud—

'To Mr. Trafford. One roomy box, fifty rupees.'

To carriage of same, one rupee eight annas. Grand total, fifty-one rupees eight annas.'

'I know nothing about it,' declared the invalid, returning the document; 'it must be for some one else—I gave no order.'

'No, Gureeb Purwar' (Protector of the Poor), urged the man, in a persuasive key, 'the box for you—yourself—*only*. Scruby Sahib giving order.'

'Then take to Scruby Sahib,' he retorted irritably. The man withdrew, and there was a long pause whilst he conferred with his companion; the result of this colloquy was that the bill man, returning and advancing some paces nearer, said—

'That Engineer Sahib, he never wanting *yet*; but when your Majesty was plenty sick, and going die, that sahib said, "Two or three hours only—make good box quick, quick, quick!" so I made. Now this sahib never, never dying,' expanding his hands, and salaaming as he spoke, 'and I poor man, what can do with box? How can lose all good Europe screws, and brass nails? and no sahib here sick, and wanting this sahib's size—for I look at him for measure.'

'I have not the faintest idea of what you are talking about,' responded Trafford, in a weary voice.

'Showing?' inquired the native, with a brisk gesture.

Trafford nodded weakly.

Presently two coolies, who had been waiting below the verandah, entered, tramping in with naked feet. As they loomed into the view of Mrs. Castellas and Trafford, it was seen that they bore on their shoulders a large empty coffin—not a reassuring sight for a shaky invalid—indeed, an almost unexampled experience.

Trafford raised himself with an effort from among his pillows, whilst Mrs. Castellas bleated—

'Take it away! Take it away! Oh—do—do take it away!'

At this crisis the doctor appeared, pounding up the steps.

'I say, what's all this?' he demanded; then, before an answer could be framed, he began to talk in very fluent and loud Hindustani, and in less than a moment, coolies, carpenter, bill and box had disappeared.

'The fact is, my dear fellow,' explained the doctor, turning to address Trafford, 'one night at Pahari when we had given up all hope and did not realize your splendid constitution—you know burying here is almost immediate—Scruby, *always* a day before the rest of the world, gave the order to his "maistrey" for your coffin—a little premature; but maybe, like taking out an umbrella on a doubtful day, his foresight saved your life. His coffin is rather a delicate subject to discuss with a live man, and I know that Scruby will be frantic when he hears of this contretemps, bill and delivery. He is very busy with his work just now, but I believe he would give six months' pay that this had not happened. He'd a million times rather pay for it himself——'

'Than see me in it. Yes, I know that,' said Trafford, with a faint smile.

'Kadir Bux could easily have tacked the item, under another name, on to labour and planks.'

'Yes, and plundered Government,' protested Trafford, with another wan smile. 'Well, I'll pay with pleasure—only too glad I've lived to settle the bill for my own coffin. I'll give you the money—it can go into store—it will be wanted some day.'

Trafford spent his convalescence at the Kennedys'. This was a delightful visit; here he was amused, nursed and petted. Later, he returned to his cheerful new quarters, where he found everything in working order; furniture had arrived, beds, almirahs, arm-chairs, and a splendid office table. He lived (by special permission) in Chandi, was now 'of it' in reality, and no longer on the outside edge. Pahari

itself remained to him a memory of horror. When once or twice he passed it on his rounds, it seemed to have relapsed into its former condition with unnatural rapidity ; it looked forlorn and abandoned, and he had a feeling that it was silently upbraiding him for his desertion, as it crouched like some scowling maleficent shape against a stormy sky.

Scruby, the ever-beforehand, had started Trafford's garden, where lucerne, zinnias, balsams, and lettuce, already flourished ; his house contained a large sitting-room, two bedrooms, and a little sort of extra apartment for the office or duffta, and here the new tenant was contented. Within his first year he learnt the Gondi language, bagged two tigers—and beheld the real Mrs. Heron !

As soon as he had recovered and resumed work, Mrs. Heron became once more his sweet sisterly friend ; constantly inviting him to dine, to practise a new song, or to play bridge. Generally Gresham and Maguire made up the table, and Mrs. Heron and Gresham were partners, and somehow or other Trafford was usually a loser. There was a good deal of chaff and joking, and pointing out of mistakes, when accounts were added up, but the cold unemotional total was the same ; and the night that Trafford lost one hundred rupees, he determined to play no more—with, or rather against, Mrs. Heron —she was too strong, and too lucky. Still, he enjoyed daily intercourse with a beautiful, gracious, sinuous lady, wearing exquisite tea-gowns and choice jewellery, exhaling fascination and delicious perfumes. She seemed to have a natural and prescriptive right to indolence and ease ; an air of luxurious elegance floated around her.

The siren always greeted Trafford with a bewitching smile (he accepted the smile as inspired by kind, sisterly sympathy) ; by degrees their intimacy deepened, and she became more intimate and confidential. After a few of her entralling songs, she

would undulate gracefully across the room, seat herself beside him on the sofa, prop a satin pillow behind her dark head and eloquent eyes, and discuss temperament, future life, magnetism, human love, and other topics on the border-land of passion.

Latterly these séances had made Trafford slightly uncomfortable; the personal note was becoming too audible, too vibrant. There was something hard and cold, something of his mother in Trafford's disposition; unconsciously he resisted the enchantress—and, naturally, the more he resisted, the more alluring she became.

One evening, reclining beside him, in the seductive atmosphere of her drawing-room, quoting the poetry of Lawrence Hope, the lady suddenly let fall her mask.

'After all, *Love* comes before everything in this dull old world, doesn't it? Is there anything else worth living for?' she whispered, looking at him closely; her lips were slightly parted as she awaited his reply.

'I'm sure I can't say,' he stammered, feeling vaguely disconcerted by the expression of her eyes.  
'I've no experience.'

She bent her head sideways, so that his hand which lay on the back of the couch was caressed by her soft scented cheek.

'You are such a good, pure-minded, simple boy—that is why I've always felt so immensely drawn to you. No one in the world understands me as *you* do—we have so much in common—there is an extraordinary affinity between us—is there not? Don't you feel it? Oh, I—*know*—you do!'

Then suddenly leaning forward, and gazing into his face with her glowing eyes, she murmured, and her voice was honey-sweet and full of restrained passion—

'You may kiss me, dear, if you like!'

Her companion's astonishment and dismay were

instantly manifest ; in a flash the siren realized her mistake, and added, with incredible adroitness—

‘ Oh, my dear boy, of course I was only joking ! You know that,’ and she glanced into the verandah, where her unconscious husband reclined in a long chair fast asleep. ‘ Naturally Tom is my true and only affinity—and you will keep your kisses for the sweet girl who will be your wife—but you may kiss—if you please—your friend’s poor little old hand ! ’

A second’s scarcely perceptible hesitation, and he touched her fingers with his lips, then hastily rose to his feet. Escape was in his attitude. ‘ I—I—must be off—it is late,’ he stammered, ‘ and I have an early start.’

‘ Ah, so you are going ! ’ she exclaimed. ‘ Oh, how soon ! Well, I’m a bit sleepy myself, so I won’t detain you ; but do come to-morrow. Come to tea.’

Subsequently, standing in the doorway, she watched his departure with a contracted brow, a countenance from which all smiles had faded, and eyes sombre with resentment. Oh, what an expression, could her admirers but see it ! It was the face of a baffled, angry woman : an infallible feminine instinct had assured Zella Heron, that with the kiss offered to Trafford, she had allowed him to slip through her fingers—and lost her hold upon him for ever !

Trafford, as he stumbled down the drive, felt completely dazed. Such was the stunning shock of his recent adventure that for a moment he could not think—his mind reeled, he seemed to have lost his identity. Was he Philip Trafford ? Was she—Mrs. Heron ? Then one piercing, pitiless fact thrust itself upon his inner consciousness ; it was this—that at last he had seen the claws of the leopardess !

## CHAPTER XIV

## THE 'COWS' HOOF' RACES

MANY a time had Sirdar's new owner placed him at the disposal of his former mistress (having added to his stable an excitable stud-bred to which Scruby had given the name of 'Biscay' (a boisterous bay); but Miss Hampton invariably excused herself, save when on a few occasions during the cold weather she had indulged in a canter with Trafford and Scruby--never with Trafford alone. The little party usually kept to the uplands of the plateau, where the springy green turf and fine forest trees recalled an English park; and various rides in the silvery moonlight, or the dew-steeped morning, stood out in red letters in the memories of at least two of the trio. Scruby, the energetic promoter of such excursions, offered to escort the lady and his friend to certain widely celebrated cattle races which took place annually on the day after the 'Til Sankrant,' a big local festival.

'Trotting bullocks in pairs in a chakra or ringhi are raced across country for half a mile,' he explained. 'There will be heaps of entries, many close events, and half the district looking on and yelling. *Do* be tempted--you'll find it quite a good show. It comes off to-morrow close to the village of Gaikhuri, or "Cows' Hoof," an appropriate starting-place, only seven miles from here--we can jog out quietly about three o'clock, and be in lots of time. What do you say?' and he appealed to Miss Hampton and Trafford, who were watching a game of tennis. After some demur on the part of the lady, the expedition was arranged; and at three o'clock the next day, when the two young men rode into the Castle compound, followed by a led pony, a slim figure in a smart Busvine habit--sole

remnant of a 'Europe' outfit,—awaited them on the verandah.

Lily was also there, lolling in a low chair, with a book in her lap, and a generous display of open-worked stockings.

'Oh, I do think you are silly!' she screamed to the visitors as they doffed their hats; 'seven miles in all the sun, just to see those bullocks galloping in carts. You know such things are only for the *native* people!'

'And why should the native people have all the fun to themselves?' inquired Trafford, who was saddling Sirdar; 'for my part, I expect a most exciting afternoon—a sort of Cow Derby!'

'Our bheesti is going also,' continued Lily. 'He says his uncle has a pair of good bullocks, and therefore he will risk two rupees—why not let *him* join you? He can take the piebald!' She burst into a shriek of laughter, and presently added, with contrasting solemnity, 'Captain Gresham thinks it awfully bad form to go to such things.'

But what Captain Gresham thought or said, sat but lightly upon her half-sister, who swung herself into the saddle, whilst Sirdar, who was exceedingly fresh, reared and kicked with exuberant spirits.

'Oh, my goodness! Whatt a bobbery pony! Do not let him kill you, Joan, for you have lots to do this evening—and mind you come back err-lie! Now, you promise?'

Joan nodded a smiling acquiescence.

'Doesn't she look awfully smart and different to everyday?' cried Lily, reluctant to lose an audience. 'Once in that saddle she gets away from all this,' spreading out her expressive Oriental fingers, and nodding her head at Scruby and Trafford. 'Yes, but she has got to come back all-ways—all-ways—ah, bah!'

Nevertheless this statement had no discouraging effect on Miss Hampton, who presently rode out of

the compound on a capering pony, with a cavalier on either hand.

Lazy Lily watched the trio with a countenance of heavy discontent as they broke into a brisk canter and finally disappeared over the brow of the hill ; then, stretching her limbs luxuriously on a long chair, and piling pillows at her back, she proceeded to console herself with the contents of a paper of greasy bazaar ‘jallabies,’ being entirely swallowed up by the East that was in her.

The village of the ‘Cows’ Hoof’ was large, red-tiled, straggling, and embowered in venerable pipal trees. Immediately outside its borders a vast concourse were already assembled ; also many horned cattle in carts, not a few ‘ekkas’ and equestrians—riding the usual cow-hocked country ‘tat’ ; vendors of fruit, jallabies (native sweets) and fiery Daru spirit, were thrusting through the crowd and offering their wares with a brazen lung power that rose high above the confused babble of the multitude.

The three English spectators were drawn up on a knoll under a Lindia—a tall, handsome tree, covered with white sweet-scented flowers ; here they were well aloof from the mob, and yet commanded a capital view of the course.

Eleven competitors had assembled for the first event, and at a casual glance carts and bullocks appeared to be inextricably mixed in one solid block, but ultimately were disentangled, sorted, and arranged in line. The jabbering rose higher and yet higher, the crowd swayed to and fro, as the drivers stood erect, awaiting the signal to start.

‘Why, it’s just a burlesque of the Roman chariot races,’ remarked Trafford.

‘And every bit as exciting in its way,’ rejoined Scruby. ‘Some of these cattle are surprisingly fast, and take a lot of driving, and there is a nice cheery, happy-go-lucky air about the whole business—but no nonsense with regard to the stakes ! They are

deposited with stake-holders before the race, as public opinion is not sufficiently strong to compel the payment of debts of honour! By the way, Miss Hampton, will you have a bet with me? Shall we have something on?'

She looked at him interrogatively—her eyes contained a reproach.

'Oh, not money, of course,' instantly divining her thoughts; 'say one of your sketches of the jungle against a tiger-skin. I've a beauty I got last hot weather—as soft as velvet.'

'No, indeed; my sketches are of little value, but, if you like, I'll bet one of them against a pair of gloves—four-button suède, size six, if you please.'

'Done with you! Trafford will be our bottle-holder.'

'But what about me, Miss Hampton?' he urged; 'may I not have something on too?'

'No, no,' she laughed; 'two bets on one race would be a dreadful strain! But perhaps you will advise me?'

'I must say I think it's rather hard lines that I may have no chance of a sketch; however, I'll be magnanimous, and do my best to pick out the winners. What do you think of the little dun pair, number three on the left; the driver has a red rag round his head. They look smart, and in good condition.'

'Very well—yes, I'll back the duns.'

'Much Trafford knows about it!' scoffed his friend. 'I choose the big white pair—they are rather bony, but unless I am mistaken, they are Khamarpanis, the fastest breed in the Central Provinces. I hope there will be no accidents or bad smashes; last year two men were killed.'

'Oh, Mr. Scruby,' protested Joan, 'if I'd known these races were so dangerous, I'd never have come.'

'The ground is soft and going good. It's only dangerous when the drivers have too much of that

abominable Daru ; then they are mad, and drive into, or over, anything. Now they are off ! Oh, I say, there's an upset already ! No harm done. Hurrah—here they come !'

As he spoke, a veritable tornado of cattle and dust, whirling wheels, blows and yells, swept by them.

'The duns have bolted—sorry I made such a bad shot,' said Trafford ; 'a red pair are leading—no, by Jove ! there's a wheel off. What a capsiz ! Yes, and another cart down on the top of them too !'

'It's my race !' cried Scruby, waving his hat. 'Look at the white pair winning hands—or rather horns—down !'

'It wasn't a square deal ! You have been here before,' objected Trafford, 'and know the form of the bullocks.'

'Well, it's all over except the shouting,' said Scruby ; 'that excitement did not last long, and I'm a sketch to the good.'

This race was succeeded by others, including several breathlessly exciting matches ; there were clouds of dust, various minor accidents, much shouting, triumph, and genial good-fellowship. Noticing that a large crowd had collected at some distance up the course, Joan said—

'Do look over there ; I'm afraid some one has been badly hurt.'

'Shall I go and see what has happened ?' volunteered Scruby, and without waiting for an answer he galloped off, and Joan and Trafford for once found themselves alone. The unconstrained confidence of their first meeting, that long talk as they rode back through the forest, with the syce's lantern swinging before them, had not been repeated ; accidental acquaintance had never melted into intimacy, and yet both were deeply sensible of a mutual and ever-increasing interest—a subtle influence each exercised over the other. Trafford haunted Joan's imagination ; and she was ever present in his day-dreams

—yet when they were together they spoke little, and then of mere commonplace topics.

Trafford was diffident; the young lady, over-weighted by a consciousness of disability, was prouder if possible than Lucifer himself, and fiercely struggled to thrust from her a strange and alluring element, that threatened to invade her existence.

Trafford watched his friend's headlong career for a moment; then he turned to look at his companion, where she sat beside him, slim and erect under the flowering Lindia. There was a tinge of colour in her small white face, a brilliance in her dark blue eyes as they met his own.

'I am awfully sorry you lost your bet,' he remarked. 'Why did you refuse the tiger-skin?'

'It would have made no difference, would it, as things turned out?' she answered, with a smile that was like a flash of sunlight; 'and if I had won, it was a hundred times too much in exchange for one of my wretched little daubs!'

'Scruby would not think so—nor would I.'

'Besides, my mother hates tiger-skins. She has turned all ours over to Captain Gresham; so what could I do with it?'

'Keep it till you had a place of your own.'

'A place?' she repeated interrogatively; she looked at her companion, and surprised an expression in his eyes that made her drop hers.

'I mean,' he continued, with a seriousness that dismayed her, 'a *home* of your own.'

'That I shall never have,' she answered, the colour coming into her face; then, looking up and meeting his gaze unflinchingly, she reiterated the word, '*Never!*'

'Oh, but look here,' moving Biscay a little nearer, and laying his hand on Sirdar's firm neck, 'listen to me—Miss Hampton—Joan—'

Joan made a quick gesture of protest, and Scruby's approach at a gallop put an end to further discussion.

'It was only a bullock after all!' he announced;

' and as the genial festivities have commenced, and the moon is up, I suppose we ought to be making tracks for Chandi ! '

As he rode beside the young lady through a romantic and fairy-like scene—the moon had risen to her full splendour, the great forests which flowed to the foot of the hills resembled a wide sea of shimmering translucent silver—the sharp crispness of the cold weather was in the air.

His companion seemed unusually gay and talkative, but Trafford, for some reason best known to himself, lagged obtrusively apart—a silent and solitary figure. Miss Hampton's smiles and animated conversation might be given to her listener, but her thoughts, her sympathy, and her heart, were with the other. Joan had long been aware that Philip Trafford cared for her, for what says the proverb ? ' Love and smoke cannot be hid.' And she—did she care for him ? She dared not ask herself the question. Weeks ago, she had endeavoured to drive him from her thoughts, recalling in good time the photograph of his mother—that handsome, haughty, implacable face ! What would Mrs. Trafford—who, it was rumoured, had entertained royalty—say, and think, of *her* relations, especially of her dusky stepfather and sister—yes, and her poor vulgar little mother, with her terrible lapses in grammar and etiquette ? She vowed to herself that she would not be such a snob and—coward, as to disown, or be ashamed, of her own flesh and blood. Philip Trafford could never be anything to her, and she regulated her manners accordingly, and set the clock to ' slight acquaintance ' ; friendship might only lead to something else—and as to that something else, it would bring family quarrels, separations, scorn, shame, and endless misery. Their two mothers stood as it were with flaming swords, and kept the gates of a forbidden Paradise. Who would have believed, when they saw how inflexibly she kept him at a distance, her manner of cold,

formal reserve, that Joan Hampton had given her sad little heart to Philip Trafford?

'It is best; it is the only thing to do,' she repeatedly assured herself, when she was alone; yet, sometimes, one or two hot unruly tears had splashed upon her sewing.

Scruby—*le fâcheux troisième*—who had thoroughly enjoyed his afternoon, was sincerely sorry when the glare of Chandi bazaar and the lights of the little Club came into sight, and soon they were riding down the steep slope into the Castle compound, to where Lily stood silhouetted in the verandah.

'Oh, my Joan, how *late* you are!' she screamed. 'Ma-ma has been calling for you such a time, to rub her side, and Captain Gresham is coming to dinner, and you've got to make the sauce and the savoury. You know you *promised* you'd be home err-lie.'

'Good-night,' said Joan, turning hastily to her escort—she had slipped off her pony before Trafford could assist her—'thank you both so much. I don't know when I've had such a delightful expedition.'

'Be quick, oh, do be quick,' urged Lily. '*Will* you hurry?' and she gave a little stamp with her foot. 'It's after eight o'clock, and he'll be here directly!'

When the two young men rode away, Scruby looked back over his shoulders and heaved an exaggerated sigh as he exclaimed—

'Alas, poor Cinderella—where *is* the Prince?'

## CHAPTER XV

### GRANDMAMMA'S BOY

AFTER a certain episode which the lady hated to recall, Mrs. Heron's attitude towards 'Traffy' underwent a gradual, subtle, but unmistakable change. There was something sharp and

even bitter among the grains of her chaff ; occasionally a little barbed word indicated how the wind blew, and there was no question about its quarter—it was from the east ! Her invitations were no longer so imperious, insistent, or frequent ; nevertheless, in general company Philip Trafford, or ‘Traff,’ was still warmly praised, and invariably spoken of as ‘such a dear, good boy—but takes a lot of knowing.’

One afternoon Mrs. Heron invited herself to tea, and descended on his bungalow in a perfectly cut white linen costume, and a smart flowery hat. She was astonished at the neatness, the little conveniences for books and pipes, the pretty matting, and the comfortable chairs, that furnished this bachelor abode. Naturally the photograph of Mrs. Trafford arrested her attention. This haughty beauty looked quite the last sort of woman to be the parent of a son who was expatriated in the depths of a jungle. She had an air of wealth too—hence, no doubt, Traff’s unusual luxuries. His sister’s photograph represented a thin, eager-looking girl at the pigtail stage, and was not specially remarkable ; but it was otherwise with the mother. Hers was a strong and grasping personality, a ruler who took her own line and kept it. Those beautifully cut lips wore an expression of hard and triumphant domination.

‘It is easy to see that Mr. Trafford is a mother’s boy,’ remarked Mrs. Baxter, who had dropped in (in answer to a hurried chit). ‘See !’ and she indicated a few bits of brass and pottery picked up in the bazaar, the silver-framed photographs, and an elaborate tea-cloth, a mass of lace and silk embroidery (the spoil of a bazaar in another clime).

‘Do you really think so ?’ murmured Mrs. Heron, languidly stirring her tea ; then, flashing a sudden glance at Trafford, who stood before her, a cake-plate in either hand, ‘Now I am not so sure. He gives me the impression of being more of a grandmamma’s

boy—and has a little bit of her apron-string clinging to him still.'

Mrs. Baxter laughed her own good-natured fat laugh.

'Don't you,' appealing to Trafford, 'still learn your Catechism every Sunday? Don't you think it perfectly devilish to say "Damn!" or to kiss a pretty woman?'

Trafford, taken aback by this bold attack, was momentarily tongue-tied with amazement. At last he said—

'I only wish I were the Galahad you imagine me to be. However, I confess that I *was* my grandmother's boy. She was most awfully good to me, and if I only had a bit of her apron-string, I would preserve it among my treasures.'

Astonished at this rally on the part of the once blundering and confused 'Traff,' Mrs. Heron exclaimed in a scoffing voice—

'Your treasures! Now I wonder what they can possibly be? I'm certain they are quaint.'

(They were merely two or three trivial notes from Miss Hampton, and the string of a small tennis-shoe.)

'Come, Mrs. Baxter,' he said, turning to her, 'you positively must, and shall, eat some of these rock cakes,—my cook's *spécialité*! He will be awfully mortified if they are neglected. Won't you change your mind?' looking at Mrs. Heron.

'My good young man, I am sure by this time you must know that I *never* change my mind—and never touch anything at tea,' she answered sharply; and in the depths of her matchless black eyes it seemed to him that he saw a faint reflection of the same malevolent influence which had so nearly overwhelmed him at Pahari.

'Why yes, my dear, of course,' said homely Mrs. Baxter, in her kindly, soothing voice, 'you have your figure to consider. Now mine ran away from me in the early twenties.'

Mrs. Heron cast a scornful glance over the lady's

spacious form, and mentally decided that even then she must have been a shapeless sack.

' You see, my dear,' continued the missionary's wife in an apologetic key, ' I had a family, and you had none. Then in the hot weather and the rains one is so desperately thirsty, and I drink such jugs of water and cold tea—which is so fattening—and in the heat one takes no exercise, and the atmosphere makes one sleepy and idle.'

' I am sure you are never idle, dear old Mother Baxter,' said Mrs. Heron, as she handed her teacup to be put down. ' And I cannot think how you are always so busy and energetic, taking such trouble with those wretched little native orphans, teaching them the Bible, and sewing, and Bajums. How can you ? '

' Well, dear, I believe it to be God's work—and I love them.'

' What ! those horrible Gonds and Santhalis, who would eat you as soon as look at you ! '

' Now, my dear, you are mistaken, or joking. You know—why, you 've been here nearly nine years—there are no cannibals in India, and the Santhalis are a race that have a very pure faith of their own. They eat no flesh, touch no liquor, and believe in one great God. Their religion——'

' Oh, my good Christian woman, please *don't* let us discuss religion at this hour of the day,' cried Mrs. Heron, laying her hand heavily on the speaker's arm and rising to her feet. ' Religion bores me to death ! '

' My dear, I know you are not in earnest,' protested the missionary lady. ' I always see you in church——'

' Oh yes, I do go there, I admit—but merely to do my thinking. Now,' with a short, excited laugh, ' I 've shocked you ! Mr. Trafford, isn't it about time we started for the Club badminton ? '

Mrs. Heron repaired to cool Pachmari for the hot

weather and the rains ; here she wore lovely foilettes, dispensed smiles and civilities, took a prominent part in picnics, dances, and all the gaieties of the season. 'Tom,' when he could tear himself from his business, ran up now and then for a week or two, and brought the Queen of Chandi the latest intelligence from her dominions. The heat, he declared, on one of these occasions, was really awful ; the whole country was parched to a white powder, cattle and herds were dying in thousands—it was the worst hot weather for thirty years.

'Oh, that is what they say every season !' remarked the lady, with languid indifference ; 'but, Tom, have you no news ?'

'Maguire has taken two months' leave, and I hear that the Rajah has been very seedy. Gresham is away, as you know—I think at Simla, or some hill station.'

'Yes, there was a man up here who told me that he lost a lot of money at Lucknow races, and gambled frightfully the whole week. I should not be surprised if he comes to grief.'

'Oh, Gresham is all right ; *he* understands the art of making other people pay for his diversions ; but I 'll tell you who really are in a bad way—the Castellas !'

'And you call that *news* !' she exclaimed sarcastically.

'Yes, this time it 's serious—it means the end. I believe the house-man will turn them out, and they will all have to go and live at Dhona, in that native hut, beside the scent-works, and pig together like coolies.'

'And serve them jolly well right !'

'The old woman was born silly. I must say I have no patience with her and her paint and her pack of fortune-telling cards. As to that lazy Lily, and her big rolling eyes—oh, well, she 's bound to go to the bad ; but I 'm sorry for poor old Castellas and Miss Hampton.'

'I can't imagine why she sticks to them. I'd have cleared out two years ago were I in her shoes,' and on this occasion Mrs. Heron spoke the pure, unadulterated truth.

'I believe there is a sort of vague impression that Trafford helps the Castellas. They say that she has cashed his cheque in the bazaar, and I hear he is there a good deal.'

'Yes, I dare say, having nowhere else to go,' sneered the lady; 'as to his lending money, he is foolish enough in some ways—but not *quite* an idiot.'

Here Mrs. Heron's unusually clear perception was at fault, for it was a painful fact that Trafford had privately come to the assistance of Mrs. Castellas, and on more than one occasion.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE ENGLISH DÂK

THE hot weather in a little up-country station usually brings the remnant that are left into closer and more sympathetic touch. After the long sweltering hours spent in a darkened bungalow (whilst scorching winds roar through the bare trees, driving clouds of red dust along the roads), the community forgather at the Club for society and amusement. Here Trafford and Miss Hampton met at tennis; she was his partner against Lily and Mr. Gresham. Lily was all but invincible; but her sister played up admirably and flitted about the courts with marvellous activity. In the rush and excitement of these hardly contested matches, Miss Hampton abandoned the reserved and monosyllabic attitude that distinguished her relations with her ally; indeed, away from the depressing atmosphere of 'The Castle,' she appeared to be another girl, young, gay, talkative,

and, despite her bleached complexion and sunburnt hat, ever the most beautiful vision in the opinion of Philip Trafford. Do as he would, she was continually in his thoughts, this shabby little girl with the small delicate face, dark hair, and deep-set, proud blue eyes. He was in love ; it was useless to struggle with his doom—he had fallen under the yoke of a power whose dominion was not to be resisted. And she ? Could he, dared he, give himself hope ? Ever since the ‘Cows’ Hoof’ Races, and his half-uttered proposal, the young lady had absolutely declined the loan of Sirdar, and her manner had become more subtly negative, more cool and distant except, as before stated, in the heat of enthusiasm at tennis or badminton. How different to her responsive and animated attitude towards his friend ; but once or twice, when he had met her unexpectedly, she had blushed—yes, there was no mistake about it—and never, never had Eliot Scruby brought the colour to the face of Joan Hampton !

After their exertions at the tennis courts, and an adjournment to the verandah for iced lemonade, or ‘nimbo’ pegs, the company sauntered homewards through the breathless May night, with the stars twinkling overhead, and the teak leaves crackling underfoot. During this dull monotonous season, Trafford often found his way to the Castle, where the châtelaine received him with open arms. She wiled away the drowsy midday hours dozing on her cane lounge, divining the future—and even the date of the longed-for monsoon—with a well-thumbed pack of cards, and eagerly welcomed all visitors, but especially ‘Traff,’ and regaled him with morsels of news (gathered, it must be confessed, from the bazaar), told his fortune, and enjoyed his company—though nothing short of physical force would have induced him to accept her repeated invitation ‘just to stay and take pot-luck.’ He was sorry for this sinking, helpless family, and anxiously desired to

assist them (not entirely for all their sakes)—but how? To this question he was unable to find any practical reply. Castellas himself was now invariably at home, looking limp, melancholy, and hollow-eyed, yet ever sanguine. ‘Work,’ he admitted, ‘was a bit slack, and the distillery temporarily closed, awaiting the flower-crop.’ Meanwhile he spent his days at a table in the dingy dining-room, ever writing, writing, writing; but when he caught sight of Trafford’s pony he threw down his pen and came promptly to greet a young fellow who had brains. Trafford too found, to his surprise, that the taciturn doctor was a clever man, and that his vocabulary contained much more than the word ‘Extraordinary!’ He even explained his proverbial silence to his new friend: ‘You see, my dear fellow, I never talk much at home, because no one listens. Joan would, but she is so busy, and the others are interested in different directions.’ His perceptions were acute, he was well read in special lines, full of original ideas, possessed of a magnificent imagination and a transparent mind. Possibly, had not Mrs. Hampton diverted his career, his course would have carried him into the great sea of success—but money, instability, and an enervating climate, had proved his bane.

Lily, when Gresham was absent, lived in a perpetual ferment of emotion and speculation; she languished and moped, neglected her appearance, and wandered aimlessly about the darkened dwelling, bewailing her hard fate—that she, like other girls, could not go to Simla and have a good time! Meanwhile she wrote many letters, and the one moment of her day was when the dâk-wallah with his brown leather bag stepped into the verandah.

When Trafford came to the Castle, Miss Hampton was rarely to be seen, but the doctor, his idle, disconsolate daughter, and ailing wife, were always at home. The latter had taken the young man into the

inner shrine not only of her heart, but of her confidence.

One airless, dark night, as Trafford was thinking of retiring, he was arrested by the sound of steps and excited whispers in the verandah, and to his astonishment Mrs. Castellas—of all people—ambled in breathless.

'I wanted just to have a word with you alone,' she panted, glancing anxiously round the room, then seating herself. 'You see, at home, the others are there, so I slipped out. Of course they think I am in bed ill, and indeed it is where I ought to be—I am that bad with my heart—but—' looking at him steadily, 'you know I feel to you like a mother, or I would not ask you this. My darling boy, I want you to lend me some money.'

'Yes, Mrs. Castellas,' and he paused expectantly.

'Of course it is only for a short time; you shall be repaid; and please not a word to Joan. I know we have been foolish, always expecting—always disappointed. I cannot think whatever the cards mean—generally they come out so lucky! But there it is! And now I am in shocking trouble. I gave a promise to Joan, and I have broken it. Yes, I have!'

Here she took out her handkerchief, and began to whimper like a child.

'I—I agreed to no more debts, no more orders or credit; but it was too much! I was so used to the other, I could not break the habit; and it seems so hard that some people should have all they want, and we nothing at all. She thinks the rent has been paid, but the money went to Whiteaway & Laidlaw. We owe nearly three years—two hundred rupees—and wherever am I to get it?'

As she concluded, she sat erect, handkerchief in hand, and gazed at Trafford interrogatively.

'We, in our day, lent here, there, and everywhere, and no one ever paid us. Oh, if we had

only been stiff and said no, I need not come borrowing now !'

Mrs. Castellas spoke as if borrowing was to her an extraordinary novelty and not an every week affair. Trafford cast a thought to his account at Grindley's ; he had spent a good deal lately, but could spare two hundred rupees. He recalled Scruby's solemn warning, a warning recently repeated, ' If you once begin to lend Mrs. Castellas money you will never stop. She is so confoundedly plaintive, and persuasive, and has no nasty pride.'

' I—I think I might manage it,' he stammered, then added the saving clause, ' for once.'

' Oh, you dear good fellow,' she cried, ' I knew you would ! It 's almost life and death, for if Joan found out I owe all this money, and have not kept to our agreement, she will do as she threatened, just return home. Joan always keeps *her* promises.'

Trafford found it easy to realize that if Miss Hampton departed the place would become as the desert to him. Yet why ? Except at an occasional game of tennis, or on Sunday, when she played the ancient and unmanageable harmonium, he never saw her. Nevertheless, if it were to cost him ten thousand rupees, he was determined that Joan Hampton should not leave Chandi.

' You see,' resumed Mrs. Castellas, ' those valuable books of Joan's will soon be sold—Mr. Hampton's collection was celebrated—the will said so many years after his death. The time is up next Christmas twelvemonth—then once more we shall *all* be rich.' (So, having dissipated her own fortune, Mrs. Castellas now proposed to enjoy her daughter's.) ' Joan is generous, she takes after me, and will give away her very shoes, and yet so saving. Laws ! it 's wonderful how she makes a little money last !' and mentioning certain homely details. ' I tell her she is downright mean !'

The interview ended in Mrs. Castellas receiving a

cheque for one hundred and fifty rupees, and fifty rupees in notes. These Trafford put in an envelope and handed to the lady, faithfully promising that he would never disclose her secret to any one, much less to her eldest daughter.

Fortified by this assurance and the intoxicating rapture of having money in her possession, Mrs. Castellas threw her arms round Trafford's neck and embraced him fervently; then, refusing his proffered escort, pioneered by her own chokedar bearing lantern and stick, the lady disappeared into the warm May night.

During the hot weather Trafford had enjoyed a certain amount of sport, but in the rains a great deal of hard continuous work had fallen to his share. Now and then he had come into collision with Gresham—chiefly with respect to what Gresham claimed as the Rajah's preserves—but which really belonged to the British Raj. Once the new Conservator, weary of excuses and broken promises, sought a personal interview with the potentate of Jambore. Gresham had often talked of inviting him (and indeed all Chandi) 'out to see his little Rajah,' but, save at the yearly sports, no one beheld His Highness; and he was then, as always, securely defended from contact with the outer world by his polite and specious Grand Vizier.

To Trafford the palace of Jambore proved a surprising disappointment: a rambling, weather-stained residence, it stood inside a high brick-and-mud wall, in a vast untidy courtyard, full of shabby retainers, cattle, and country carts. At one side ran a long line of ill-kept stables, and under a solitary tree a withered old elephant swung at his picket. Trafford delivered his card to a pompous functionary in tawdry green and gold, who had strutted towards him; and after waiting for an hour, with a patience based on a determination not to be annoyed, received a message announcing that 'His Highness sota hai.'

—in short, was sleeping. So there remained nothing for the Forest Officer but to turn about and ride away, carrying his grievance with him.

‘I say, my dear fellow !’ exclaimed Gresham in his hearty jovial voice as they met next day in the Club, ‘I am sorry His Highness could not receive you, but you know it was rather informal going there just off your own bat—and chucking in a card. It’s a thing that—er—of course you don’t know—but, my dear fellow, it’s not *done*! Any communication should be sent through the proper channel, and that—slapping his broad chest—is Ivor Gresham. If you are a very good boy I’ll take you over and present you some day ; but the Rajah is awfully stiff and shy of what he calls “little people.”’

‘He be blowed !’ cried Scruby, who was listening ; ‘a jungly fourth-class Rajah, with five guns, next to no education, and sodden with opium, refusing to receive an English gentleman, who, let me tell you, is not a little person in this district or elsewhere,’ and he shot a furious and significant glance at Gresham, who loftily replied—

‘Oh well, my good Gosling, you need not stick your quills up ! It’s Jambore’s little way. I cannot help it,’ and with a shrug of his broad shoulders he entered the card-room.

‘Tell you what,’ said Scruby, turning to his friend, ‘it’s an extraordinary thing that before Gresham got hold of Jambore he was often on view, and not at all a bad sort of little chap ; he even came in here now and then and had a game of billiards, and talked broken English, and we showed him pictures just as if he were a small boy. He seemed pretty intelligent too, and immensely interested in one or two French things that old sinner Chapman picked up at Port Said.’

‘Beastly !’ ejaculated Trafford.

‘Yes. Well, I’m sorry for Jambore. He would like to go to Europe, to cross the “kala pani,” and see the world ; but he has no available funds—his

household devours every rupee, and such a trip is costly. Then he is weak and tied down with debts. I believe latterly he has given up all enterprise, all interest in anything, and soaks his brain in mudduck.'

'Mudduck—what's that ?'

'The worst sort of drug going. It's made of opium and the pounded cinders of the babul tree. There is some deadly quality in this combination. A man who drinks whisky schrab may still fight along, and even a man who takes ganja—always provided they both *work* ; but a fellow who takes the mudduck pill is done for !'

'Couldn't Gresham interfere, or do something ?' asked Trafford.

'Gresham ? Lor' bless you, not he ! Why, he gets a free hand—he—'

Scruby paused for a moment, then he went on—

'Jambore is surrounded by blood-sucking parasites. I don't mean to insinuate that boss Gresham is one of these, for, hang it all, he's English—a public-school man. However, there's no denying that he has dropped into a nice soft thing, and is never short of coin. You know you can't go racing and up to Simla for nothing ! He declares—and we have no reason to dispute the fact—that he has done wonders for Jambore; managing the timber and elephants, and selling lots of teak and lac, and for all the Rajah's debts he has a fine big hoard in the Tosha Kana, or jewel-house. These, native princes gather and keep ; and there is no doubt there is coal and manganese in his territory only waiting to be worked ; but somehow there is an impression that Jambore affairs are in a rickety state—like those of some other people we know.'

Trafford was silent. Mrs. Castellas had recently made a second raid upon him.

'I wonder,' continued Scruby, 'why Gresham always fends us off from the Rajah ? We are harmless—yet he acts as a first-class warder.'

'I suppose he likes to show that he is important and a big man ; between ourselves, I think he is a crooked sort of chap.'

'Crooked—possibly ; big man—yes, very much so ! The days when Gresham wore our shirts and boots and was in actual straits for food and shelter, now seem to be a sort of dream. When I look at Gresham, clothed with authority and by a London tailor, smoking the best cigars and bossing the whole place—oh, never mind me, Phil, old boy, I believe I was born with a knife in my mouth, instead of the traditional silver spoon, and can't help myself.'

When the rainy season had nearly come to an end Trafford reviewed his year's work with grave misgivings. At one moment he believed he had done fairly well, at others he felt depressed and as if, like Sisyphus, he was wasting his energies in rolling a great stone uphill—which same stone invariably thundered to the foot. Perhaps in the direction of clearing, planting, felling, and timber depots, matters had improved—but it had been a tough job. He had also discovered—thanks to the vigilance of his head forest-ranger—a grand *cache* of horns and skins in the heart of an innocent little village on the borders of the Jamboree preserve. There were the usual loud protestations, expostulations, and explanations ; nevertheless, Trafford sifted (so he believed) the matter to the bottom, sternly examined old licences and passes, and proceeded to administer justice. Some of the booty he returned, but a considerable portion was solemnly confiscated.

It appeared to Trafford that if his work was going smoothly in one part of the 'A' class reserve, there was bound to be trouble in another ; theft, poaching, burning, and the beating of forest guards. Surely he was struggling with some unseen but deadly influence ? Were not he and Joan Hampton alike striving with the hopeless and the impossible ? He felt a firm conviction that a silent, active, ever-

present force was working against him. Joan's mother was working secretly against her (and, shameful to state, with *his* assistance!). Well, he would fight his enemy, or enemies—yes, were matters to come to a climax, with the very last breath in his body!

The arrival of the English Dâk, bringing a pile of papers and a few letters, made a cheerful interruption, and dispersed some gloomy reflections. Here was a letter from Milly!

In five minutes' time Trafford was running over to Scruby's quarters in a state of breathless excitement. Scruby, intent on his own mail, looked up as he dashed in.

'I say!' he gasped, 'I say, old Gosling! What do you think? I've had a letter from home; my sister is coming out to me next month! She will be here for Christmas. Won't it be ripping?'

Scruby sat up astonished, his eyes widened, his lips parted. After an expressive silence he replied—

'Yes, all right for *you*—I'm not so sure that it will be ripping for *her*.'

'Oh, won't it just! She loves the country and animals and tennis and riding; she'll be in her element. Look here, suppose you and I run up to Calcutta and get a piano and chairs and a dinner set, and lots of jam and chocolate?'

'I can't get off; I wish I could; but take my advice, and let the young lady choose for herself when she arrives—then she cannot lodge complaints.'

'Wise old Gosling! You always see all round a subject. I believe you were born with a third eye. Well, anyway, we must try and give her a good time.'

'Righto!' agreed his friend, with emphasis.

The interest at the Club caused by a sensational scandal in the English papers, was now immediately and completely extinguished by this stupendous piece of local intelligence.

'Trafford's sister was coming out to him, and would arrive in Chandi in less than five weeks!'

## CHAPTER XVII

## A WOMAN OF FASHION

POOR Mrs. Vernon Trafford had been sorely disappointed in her husband ; to her intimates—and these were many—she made no secret of this distressing fact. It is true that there were certain ill-natured people who suggested another side to the picture (handsome and successful women are not without their detractors), but if this were the case, it had been buried with the dead man, and whatever the reverse represented, its outline had long been effaced.

Captain Trafford was introduced to pretty Miss Valeria Lennox when she and her aunt were spending a season in Folkestone—his regiment, the 28th Hussars, being quartered at Shorncliffe. He was a good-looking young fellow, an only child, fairly well off and popular. Valeria Lennox, a tall, well-bred girl of twenty, with charming manners, and bright bewitching eyes, attracted him on the spot, and he succumbed to her fascinations within one week, followed her up to town, and before a month had elapsed the engagement was announced. ‘Happy the wooing that is not long a-doing !’ Miss Lennox was considered to have done well for herself ; indeed, some critics (mothers of daughters) marvelled to one another how a girl with a nose so large, and a fortune so small, could have drawn such a prize in the matrimonial lucky-bag.

The bride was distinctly pleased with her husband, herself, her French maid, and her stepping cobs. She enjoyed perfect health, youth, and an unusual share of beauty ; the criticism of her nose was merely the blunted shaft of envy. She, however, lacked one attribute—the lady had been born without a heart. Terrible events, or emotions that

stirred others to a white heat of pity, anger, love, or sympathy, left Mrs. Vernon Trafford cold and unmoved as a rock beneath the sea. She had nevertheless a taking and even impulsive manner to those she met in daily life ; and they little guessed at the amount of fierce ambition, and callous selfishness, that charming manner concealed. By and by, Valeria and Freddy began, so to speak, to 'find one another out.' Her servants (those clever people) had discovered the real Mrs. Trafford within a few days. He realized that, though always even-tempered and unruffled, enchanting to behold, a clever manager, a radiant hostess, she did not care—as he mentally expressed it—'a tuppenny dam' for him or the kids'! These she joyfully abandoned to nurses, or to certain motherly friends, and when they were with her—their own beautiful fairy-like mamma—she punished their insignificant misdoings with ruthless severity, with the result, that the Trafford children were in those days two little models of deportment, as well as dress.

On her side, Valeria Trafford considered the good-looking cavalry officer to be slow-witted, halting of speech, and even dull ; never advertising or pushing himself to the front, and even suffering others to reap where he had sown. This was intolerable, and should end. Freddy was keen about his profession ; he had invented a wonderful new horseshoe, and with this proverbially lucky omen in her hand she saw herself entering a splendid field for her nascent ambition. She would carve out Freddy's career, and become one of the noble band of women whose task it is 'to advance their husbands.' Her undaunted mind even strayed into the region of political and diplomatic appointments, for with ripening years her beauty had developed, also the knowledge of its effect on others,—more especially highly placed elders ; in short, her audacity and her hopes were boundless.

Freddy was now a major, and his wife had obtained the secret promise of a post—when an opening should occur; it was a position that held the key to a somewhat important future, but unhappily it was Freddy himself who made a vacancy, and gave a step in the 28th Hussars. At Aldershot, during an exhausting field-day in the Long Valley, his tired horse fell and rolled over him; Major Trafford was mortally injured, and only survived two days. He had time to dictate his will and confer with his mother—a strong-minded Irish woman—to whom he committed the care of his children, Phil and Milly.

'They will be a comfort to you, grannie,' he said; 'and poor Valeria does not care for kids—and—and—' he would have added, 'is bound to marry again,' but loyally held his peace.

Every one felt profound pity for the bereaved young widow—with perhaps the exception of one or two of Fred's brother-officers. She, however, was left comfortably off, and immediately repaired to the Continent, there to hide and indulge her grief. Two years later the beautiful Mrs. Vernon Trafford arose in a certain quarter of the London firmament, where she established herself and her little retinue in a fashionable part of Mayfair. The house was small—there was no space for her family, merely room for self and servants—guests were entirely out of the question.

The new occupant was a capital woman of business; she had bought 300 Queen Street cheap, but dilapidated, and exercised her wonderful taste in doing it up to perfection—being endowed with originality, imagination, and money. For instance, the stuffy little butler's pantry behind the dining-room was now transformed into a delicious smoking-lounge. Stolen in the same way, a dingy bedroom at the back of the drawing-room above was, by means of a cunning arrangement of mirrors, delicate silk panels, and draperies, changed into a bower of delight—

just the restful luxurious little nest where two might enjoy a 'heart-to-heart' talk ! The front drawing-room was a good-sized apartment, with a few choice pictures, a couple of rare Spanish cabinets ; there was an Aubusson carpet on the polished floor, and ample space for three card-tables. If the little sitting-room was dedicated to dreams and confidences, the other, with its piles of books, magazines, and open bureau, spoke of the outer and more practical world.

Owing to the confiscation of one apartment, bed-chambers were scarce. There was a large luxurious chamber, directly over the drawing-room—with one adjoining for a maid—two women occupied the attics, and the man slept out. It will, it is hoped, be clearly understood from this description, that the space in No. 300 Queen Street, W., was most strictly limited. Mrs. Trafford, when she had settled in—assured her acquaintances, with plaintive and appealing eyes, that 'the little house was just big enough for her alone. Old Mrs. Trafford was so devoted to the children, that she really dared not remove them ; it would be positively cruel even to hint at such a step ; so, for her part, she made the best of things, and ran down to visit them often. Philip and Milly were such dears ! the boy a splendid little fellow—such a separation nearly broke her heart.'

By and by Phil went to school, and the girl remained in the country—she was too delicate to live in London, and as, unfortunately, the country *never* agreed with her mother, they must exist apart ! Mrs. Trafford was almost a stranger to her offspring, though, from afar, they admired and adored, with heart-whole admiration, the lovely, exquisitely dressed parent, who was always much sought after, and full of engagements, and who, when she did give them a day, made them delightful speeches, delightful presents, and carried them to *matinées* and

restaurants (and subsequently to Waterloo station) with such affectionate alacrity. The two poor innocents never understood that their idol was a true Society woman of the time, with all its elegance and modernity : breathing the spirit of the age, the spirit of material things and the rule of money. The beautiful widow had not lacked admirers or offers of marriage, but so far the suitors had not been of sufficient importance ; she preferred to be her own mistress—free to roam hither and thither ; to yacht in Norway, to winter in Egypt or the West Indies, as the whim took her—always one of a gay party, and invariably attended by a clever maid.

When at home she entertained her own particular and exclusive set to bridge teas and dinners ; she was fond of the theatre, and 'raced' in an unobtrusive fashion ; in fact, the clever lady knew more about 'Ruff,' and the odds on events, than the political history of the day, and was a constant attendant at Sandown, Newmarket, and Kempton. She replenished her wardrobe in Paris, and never failed to spend three weeks at Aix. Now, alas ! time and circumstance stood hand in hand athwart her rosy path. Milly, her daughter, was past nineteen, nearly twenty, in fact, and certain disagreeable people (women) had been asking detestable questions.  
'What has become of your little girl ? When *are* we going to see her ?'

Unfortunately there was nothing for it but to make the best of the matter, to introduce Milly into her conversation, and give her a little preliminary boom ; praising her sweet disposition, declaring her to be a real darling, and proclaiming her own passionate longing for the child's company. She resolved to install Milly in the attic (at present a box-room), present her, take her about, marry the girl, and have done with her !

It must be understood, that Mrs. Trafford had not seen her daughter for more than three years ; then,

she was a silent, thin young creature, with great wondering eyes, and a foolish way of blushing whenever her mother addressed her—but three years make a wonderful difference at sixteen !

It was half-past seven o'clock on a chilly April evening, and Mrs. Trafford stood by the fire in the front drawing-room talking to a pretty little woman in an elaborate tea-gown—who sat coiled up on the polar-bear-skin hearth-rug,—and occasionally glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece, or at her own charming reflection in the tall Empire mirror. Amazing to relate, she was almost as handsome as her photograph ! She carried her head nobly, and had retained her graceful figure ; although forty-five last birthday, this fortunate lady appeared to be at least ten years younger. To-night she wore an admirably fitting grey-blue velvet gown, a diamond bandeau glittered in her hair, her long gloves lay on the mantelpiece.

' I wonder what she will be like ? ' murmured her companion, gazing into the fire with a dreamy expression on her small dark face.

' I wonder when she will be here ? ' amended Mrs. Trafford. ' You know I 'm dining with the Foxrocks to meet Prince Hertenstein, and Dolly will be crazy if I keep them waiting ! ' As she spoke she tapped her velvet slipper impatiently on the rug.

' The last time I saw Milly she was a shy, lanky creature, all legs, like a young foal,' resumed Mrs. Wallingford, ' but without the foal's airy self-confidence.'

' That will be easily acquired,' remarked her mother serenely. ' What a bore that she should pitch on *this* night to arrive ! and how noble of you, to take my place ! '

' Won't you feel funny, Valeria, with an absolutely strange young woman a fixture in the house ? ' asked

the lady on the floor, raising a pair of very knowing dark eyes to her friend's beautiful impassive face. 'I do hope she won't be like Lucy Greville's infliction—a red-armed gawk, with a great gaping mouth that is always asking the most awful questions.'

'Not at all likely, I venture to predict,' rejoined Mrs. Trafford, with a significant tightening of her lips. 'I expect I shall be rather proud of Milly, though she is not a bit like me—quite a Trafford. Lally, I'm afraid I must go, and leave you to do the maternal! You will dine with her, see her to bed, and wait up for me, like a darling. I'll be home by twelve. There's a novel—don't let *her* see it—that will make you sit up in real earnest!'

'All right, Valeria. I'll play your part, and be your understudy to the best of my ability.'

'Well, dear, you will make my excuses,' touching the bell as she spoke. 'I really dare not wait any longer. I must go. Dolly Foxrock is such a vixen—it is as much as my position is worth to keep her dinner cooling. The brougham, Ross,' to an impasive figure in the doorway, who instantly retired.

'Dear me, what a mask that man wears!' exclaimed Mrs. Wallingford.

'Nothing would ever put him out, not even an earthquake. I can see him entering in his quiet way and announcing, "If you please, ma'am, the cook has murdered the kitchenmaid, and I should like to add that the house is on fire"!'

Her friend gave a little low laugh, and began to draw on her gloves. The next moment the door was suddenly flung wide, and Ross, the unmoved, announced—

'Miss Trafford.'

## CHAPTER XVIII

## MRS. TRAFFORD'S MISGIVINGS

THE two ladies started involuntarily, as there was the sound of rapid footsteps, and silken rustling, then a tall girl, wearing an immense black hat, literally flew into the room.

'Mother!' she exclaimed, and before that elegant personage, struggling with a tight glove, was aware, she was in her arms.

'My dear Milly!' she gasped, as she hastily extricated herself and patted her hair. 'Oh, darling, how you have grown!' and she contemplated her for a moment in expressive silence.

Yes, Milly was as tall as herself, and resembled her closely—not merely in height alone. Mrs. Trafford's critical gaze instantly perceived the delicate features, exquisite skin, and truly wonderful eyes—eyes that were an idealized copy of her own. Undoubtedly the girl had developed rapidly, and was now a brilliantly lovely young woman! A young woman who was to sleep in the box-room, and wear her mother's altered gowns; a young woman who was to make herself useful, dust the best china, arrange flowers, go messages, write notes, and entertain the bores. This Milly was, to say the least of it, unexpected. Here was a beauty and a personality that could not be set aside or concealed.

Aloud her mother merely said—

'Darling, I do hope you won't be hurt, will you? but to-night I've an engagement—such a bore!' (Her engagements were invariably bores.) 'I've to dine with Lady Foxrock; she would not let me off, as she is expecting Prince Hertenstein, so I must leave you—but only for three hours. Here,' indicating her companion with a wave of her hand, 'is

Mrs. Wallingford, who will keep you company, and be my understudy.'

Mrs. Wallingford, who had meanwhile remained petrified on the rug, now rose to her feet.

' You remember her, don't you ? '

' Why, of course I do,' turning round eagerly ; ' you gave me heaps of delicious cream chocolates,' said Milly, in a high, clear voice. ' How I loved sweets, especially marrons glacé.—Oh, I was such a greedy pig ! '

' Greedy or not, you will be glad of your dinner, Milly,' said Mrs. Wallingford, a little awestruck by this girl's radiant youth and beauty ; ' you and I will be *tête-à-tête* when your mother is out, and I shall expect you to tell me *all* your secrets.'

' That is an esay matter,' she answered gaily, taking the pins out of her hat, and flinging it on the sofa. ' I have not a single secret in the world ! I am all on the surface, as you will soon see, and just bubbling over with a frantic desire to come out and enjoy myself ! '

Mrs. Trafford's expression as she listened became a little fixed ; she was confronted with the vision of her own youth, full of the *joie de vivre*, and the vision affected her painfully. However, this was no time for sentimental reflection. The announcement, ' The brougham is at the door,' summoned her forth, and bestowing an eloquent glance on Mrs. Wallingford, and an affectionate pat on Milly's shoulder, with, ' Mind you make yourself at home, darling ! ' she passed out, her long, grey velvet train trailing languidly behind her.

Mrs. Trafford returned at half-past eleven (actually driven home, no, not by yearning, maternal affection, but by sheer anxiety and curiosity), and discovered her friend and representative extended at full length on the sofa, a cigarette between her lips, and the novel in her hands.

'Well?' she exclaimed, or rather interrogated, throwing off her opera cloak, and sinking into a chair.

'Oh, so you are back!' looking up; 'this *is* a poisonous book! It is well. She dined, she was tired, she adores her mother, and she has gone up to bed in the box-room.'

'How you do harp upon that box-room!' protested Mrs. Trafford impatiently. 'I've made it quite pretty, with white paint, chintz, and new paper.'

'Yes, but you cannot make it, with all your good will, any bigger than a cupboard to swing a kitten; the window is in the slates, and there is no fire-place.'

'I know. It's impossible to make this house elastic, or blow it out like an air cushion. Milly must just take what there is.'

'She seemed a little surprised to be going aloft among the servants.'

'Was she, poor darling? I'm afraid many surprises are in store for her! How did you get on?'

'Admirably; I don't think you need be uneasy. Milly will soon make a great match—she knows her way about.'

'What—that child!'

'Yes, that child—and she is a child. She is just the unexpected sort of girl that will have a *furore*. She does not play bridge, she has never smoked, she has not embarked on any social questions—she does not talk slang.'

'And what does she do? A girl in these days, no matter what her looks may be, must have some label. She must specialize.'

'I don't know quite yet. I think she can perhaps hold her tongue!'

'And use her eyes?' supplemented her mother quickly.

'Not in the way you think; but from one or two of her remarks I gathered that she is observant.'

'How do you mean ?'

'Well, I fancy she looks about her, and sees things. For instance, I should not be surprised if she observed that Lady Lucas relates risky stories, that Harry Villiers drinks, that Bluff the millionaire tells awful lies, that Lord Bobby is a shocking snob, and that General Morland and Sir Lucas Wakefield both want to marry you.'

'My dear, what nonsense ! You talk as if she was forty.'

'No, I talk of heredity. She has your face, your brains, and your extraordinary instinct for people ; but she has, what you have not—a heart.'

'Then, so much the worse for her ! Hearts are an encumbrance, and entirely out of date.'

'Unfortunately, hers is an extra large size, and it is full of her own dear, sweet, beautiful, darling mother—and the glorious time they are to spend together !'

'Good Heavens ! Glorious time indeed ! a time of incessant hard labour. I shall present her at a May Court, take her to the Kingstons for Ascot—I have about six engagements a day—and a share of an opera box. I shall have her photo done by Flatterette, and send it to the best weekly papers. Mrs. Puff will write me nice little paragraphs—I've put some things in *her* way. Of course, I shall get Milly's frocks at Rookes', her hats at Wiked's—and I ask you, could any mother do more ?'

'To launch a daughter on the market ? Well—no.'

'Lally, you really are a little beast !'

'I rather wish she were my girl. What would you think of giving her to me—I'm next door, I have a nice large bedroom, a middle-sized heart, and a big motor.'

'Don't be ridiculous ! I shall give a few dinners here, and at Hurlingham—never more than eight—eight is the perfect number.'

'Yes, and with eligible guests—*bien entendu.*'

Mrs. Trafford nodded assent.

'I shall ask Algy Bullfit, he is dull, but he has no near relatives, and £30,000 a year.'

'They say he spends every penny of that—and more.'

'Lord Falcombe——'

'Too poor; his mother is looking for an heiress—home industries preferred.'

'Jones ap Jones——'

'He was a pit boy; naturally his bride must be a lady of title.'

'I see,' in the voice of a patient sufferer, 'there is no talking to you, Lally; you are impossible.'

'Just one word before I go. *Don't* invite pretty, smart married women to your little dinners—give the poor child a chance! I shall follow her course with the deepest sympathy, interest, and good will. The girl is wonderfully pretty, Valeria, with a wild sort of spirit, a warm heart, and at the back of all there is a trace of the Puritan!'

'The Puritan!' in a shocked voice. 'My dear Lally, how could she possibly be that?'

'She does not inherit that strain from you, I admit—her Irish blood and her Irish grandmother have something to say to it. Now, she is about to plunge into the great whirlpool of London Society. I wonder how she will emerge at the end of a season? A little battered—clutching a coronet? or just her simple original self?'

'Lally, I wonder you can lie there, talking such arrant nonsense at this hour of the night!'

But Mrs. Wallingford merely waved a lily-white hand and continued—

'Let me remind you, Valeria, that during the last few years girls have emancipated themselves; they march with the times, and are none the worse for it. They have pursuits, clubs, professions and *latch-keys*.'

'Horrible, unfeminine creatures!' exclaimed Mrs. Trafford (who smoked and betted), with an expression of profound disgust.

'Well, do not keep your girl too tightly in hand, my dear, that is all I can say.'

'Milly adores me,' declared her mother; 'and will do exactly as she is told.'

'Dear, sweet old-fashioned daughter! Do you suppose she has no bent—no individuality—no—' and she paused, 'lover?'

'Good Heavens, no! I don't believe the child knows a man under sixty.'

'There is Big Ben tolling midnight, and I must be off,' said Mrs. Wallingford, rising from the sofa with a great yawn. 'Remember, if I can be of any help, shopping, chaperoning, gooseberry-picking, you have only to telephone next door. Don't trouble to move—my furs are in the hall—night—night!'

The lady at the moment descending the stairs was Mrs. Trafford's next-door neighbour, and an old school-fellow (the wealthy widow of a City man, nearly thirty years her senior, who had died of gout in the stomach), had neither the brains, the wide reach, nor the ambition of her friend Valeria. Fashionable functions bored her, as did visits, card-leaving, and note-writing—in short, the 'hard labour' of society. She was, however, a bridge fanatic, and belonged to several smart clubs, enjoyed the theatres, a good dinner, and loved dogs.

Small 'Chows' were her particular extravagance, and it was whispered that one of her blinking, helpless pets had cost a thousand pounds. All the same, her ready hand was ever extended to help the poor, and not a few dumb animals had good cause to thank the tender heart of Lalla Wallingford. In her way, Mrs. Wallingford was a philosopher, an acute ironical observer, took life as it came, and was under no delusions respecting her attractive neighbour, whom she both liked and admired. She was aware that,

were she to die, Valerie Trafford would not experience the slightest regret, merely heave a passing sigh for the loss of certain conveniences, such as the loan of a motor or a man-servant. Poor Valeria! never was any one more wanting in love and human sympathy. She could not help herself; she was born so. At school, when the sudden death of her mother was broken to her with tears, she confessed to her friend, ‘Of course I ought to be very sorry, and I would be if I could; but I can’t! I don’t *mind*; and I know, I shall have mother’s watch and all the diamonds.’

But Valerie’s girl was totally different—a beautiful impulsive nature, overflowing with love and tenderness. Poor child!

For nearly an hour after the departure of her guest, Mrs. Trafford sat alone beside the dying fire. She was thinking profoundly, and a wintry look had crept into her face—for the thoughts that swarmed about her were not only unwelcome, but strange. As Ross, entering to extinguish the lights and close the house, disturbed these morbid reflections, she rose, collected her cloak and gloves, and wearily ascended to the best front bedroom.

## CHAPTER XIX

### ECLIPSE

IT must be confessed that Milly Trafford found herself considerably cramped for accommodation; the little ex-box-room, despite its fresh wallpaper and bright chintz, afforded no scope for a tall girl inclined to flinging her things about, accustomed to the spacious apartments of a country house, and fine airy quarters at the private school in Dresden.

As she blankly surveyed the limited space, she wondered how and where she was to bestow her voluminous wardrobe, and other belongings? This question was indeed a puzzle. Milly was sincerely fond of dress, and enjoyed an allowance of one hundred a year—this she expended lavishly—her outburst of extravagance was chiefly confined to hats. To tell the truth, the young lady had a passion for head-gear, and the mere sight of a smart milliner's window had almost the same attraction for Miss Trafford, as the swing doors of a gin palace for an habitual drunkard!

Tired with a long journey, which included a hideous crossing, she slept like an infant, and awoke with the twittering of sparrows immediately above her head. Gradually she became aware of a sensation of overwhelming happiness; yes, she was at home with her mother at last! The bare idea was so stimulating that she sprang out of bed, rang for her bath, and began to dress. As she sat arranging her masses of splendid brown hair, a cat washing its fur on the skylight paused deliberately in its toilet, and superintended the performance with sympathetic and flattering interest.

Leaving a somewhat untidy room, Miss Trafford rushed downstairs in the confident expectation of finding her mother and breakfast. Amazing to relate, neither were to be seen; only an astonished housemaid who was sweeping the hall, and was evidently unaccustomed to such an early raid!

'Mrs. Trafford breakfasts in her room, and if Miss Trafford will go up to the drawing-room, her breakfast will be served in ten minutes—it was just half-past eight,' announced Ross, the imperturbable.

The drawing-room had not yet been dusted, there were ashes in the grate, a litter of cigarette ends in a tray, and a new novel lay on the floor. Milly strolled round the apartment with her hands locked behind her back, admiring the china, the pictures,

the large signed photos of conspicuous men and women, and all the dainty knick-knacks in the cabinets. What taste her mother had ! Then she cast herself into a corner of the Chesterfield, opened the book, plunged into the middle of it, and commenced to read.

Milly for her age (nearly twenty) was a curiously innocent girl. Sixteen years of country life with her Irish grandmother had kept her mind pure. Old Mrs. Trafford was a widely read, cultivated woman, fond of literature, of gardening, of a joke —indeed, she was in her way a wit—and when younger had travelled and seen a good deal of life. She loved poor Freddy's girl, who was truly the child of her old age. In Milly, she recognized something of her own character ; her warm-heartedness, her impetuosity, and a touch of Celtic temper, recalled a far-away youth. She allowed her granddaughter a free rein in many ways, but undesirable companions and bad books were kept sternly at a distance.

The private school at Dresden, the old lady had selected with anxious care shortly before her death, and here, Milly was taught to be an accomplished young woman, and here again she led the sheltered life.

The poisonous novel in her hand was in a way sealed to her. She thought it 'queer,' and one or two expressions puzzled her, and one or two made her face quite hot ; 'it was not her mother's book,' she assured herself, 'Mrs. Wallingford had left it behind her,' and here was Ross announcing breakfast. The establishment in the light of an April morning, though beautifully furnished, had a limited baby-house air, which in the electric light, the gleam of mirrors and silken draperies, had not been so apparent ; the note it struck then was luxury and cultivated taste, and now the note added, 'for the sole enjoyment of *one* inmate.'

At last, at ten o'clock, her mother summoned

Milly. Mrs. Trafford, who looked charming in a white lace tea-jacket, was sitting up in bed, and on the pale satin counterpane were scattered many envelopes and open letters.

'Well, darling !' as the girl flung herself on her and kissed her rapturously. 'How did you sleep ?'

'Oh, splendidly,' sitting on the bed. 'I feel like a young lioness !'

'That's right, for we have a great deal to do to-day. You see there is your Court gown to be fitted, you are to be presented on Friday week—and there's not much time.'

'Presented ! Oh, mummy dear, how delightful ! I shall love it !' and she clapped her hands.

'You are not a bit nervous then ? Some girls think it *such* an ordeal.'

'Oh no,' with a happy laugh, 'I shall enjoy it enormously. I am longing to see the King and Queen, and all the people one reads of in *The World*,—they took it at the Linden-strasse. I can make such nice curtseys,' and she slipped off the bed, and executed as graceful a *révérence* as it was possible to see ; then rising, 'I am so happy to be at home with you, dear darling !' She took her mother's surprised hand and laid her exquisite lips upon it. 'That curtsey was to you. Oh, mummy, you do look beautiful—a queen !'

'Mummy,' as she contemplated the animated graceful girl, was conscious of unaccustomed emotions; a curious pride, that this really lovely creature should be her flesh and blood, and resembling her so closely in appearance (but in character as the poles apart). Yes, she was actually experiencing a new sensation. As she held her daughter with a long penetrating gaze—she realized that she was face to face with her own youth, and saw herself as others once beheld her—a girl of twenty with her life before her ! Milly had the same delicate nose and upper lip, the same long neck, and well-set-on proud little

head ; her skin was flawless, with a faint pink tinge in her cheeks, and pencilled straight brows. The eyes—they were the jewels of her face—long-lashed, dark grey, and extraordinarily expressive ; surely they were eyes that could melt or laugh or weep, and had a soul behind them. Now, Mrs. Trafford's own fine orbs were of a somewhat cold blue, that never had done anything but look keenly and continually after her individual interests.

' You see what a quantity of letters I have, dear child—stacks of them every morning—invitations. You will be a help and answer them, won't you ? '

' Of course, dearest mum. I will do anything and everything for you ! '

Mrs. Trafford, unconscious of any quickening impulse of maternal affection, gazed at her with an air of languid perplexity ; this girl, with her longing, hungry expression, and her irritating demonstrative nature must be restrained ! such overflowing affection was all very well during their scanty meetings. Then, she had suffered caresses for two wearisome days, but to have this stormy devotion living in the same house—no, it was not to be endured !

' We must go to Rookes' to see about your dress, to Woolland's for your veil and gloves and feathers, and remind me of your bouquet. I 've ordered the electric brougham at eleven, and then we will start.' She saw in Milly's eyes that another embrace was imminent. ' No, darling, no,' drawing back, ' we love one another very much, you and I—no need for kissing. One kiss at night will be our allowance.'

Milly smiled and nodded, but when she retreated up to the box-room, there to unpack her best hat and frock, her feelings were just a little chilled ; her warm affections had encountered their first repulse.

As Mrs. Vernon Trafford, an important customer—sauntered through Rookes' magnificent showrooms every eye was fixed upon the girl who followed her ;

ladies who were merely idling and looking at the new models, ladies who were awaiting their pet fitters—and several of these belonged to Mrs. Trafford's own set—murmured among themselves, 'The daughter! How perfectly lovely!' and a third said, 'Now we can understand why she has never been produced before!' then with smiles as the topic approached, 'My dearest Valeria, I need not ask who this is?'

'No, my little girl. Lady Gaye, this is Milly. Mrs. Pontifex, let me introduce my daughter. We have come to see about her dress. I have an appointment in five minutes' time.'

'Oh, you are always so *prévenant* and punctual,' said Mrs. Pontifex; 'your first visit to London, Miss Trafford?'

'No, I've been up now and then for a few days, but of course,' with a radiant smile, 'that is different to coming to live here altogether.'

'I hope you will enjoy yourself, my dear.'

'Thank you very much, I am sure I shall.'

'Do look at poor Lady Lester—how thin she has become,' remarked Mrs. Trafford. 'Positively she is rattling inside her clothes!'

'Ah, yes—terribly gone off,' agreed Lady Gaye, with an emphatic gesture. 'You see Sir Clifford is—as we all know—conspicuously and crazily in love with Cissie Deloraine!'

'And poor Lola feels it frightfully—yes—yes—she's heart-broken.'

'Oh, I'm not so sure,' interposed another lady, who was standing by examining a piece of lace, 'I've an idea that she has a consoler. In fact, I happen to know that Mr. Goldmann has given her a perfectly lovely jewel,' and she surveyed her audience with an expression of grave significance.

'What! *À propos* of nothing?' exclaimed Lady Gaye, with a disagreeable laugh. 'How kind!'

'Ah, here is my fitter,' said Mrs. Trafford, '*au revoir*. Come along, Milly darling.'

'Mother,' she whispered, as they moved forward, 'were those married people they spoke of ?'

Valeria Trafford looked at the girl's startled eyes and blazing cheeks ! Here, indeed, was yet another embarrassment ! Milly was as ignorant of the seamy side as a week-old lamb !

'That is only just their way of talking, my dear. They were speaking in a joking way—you must not take them seriously. Now I wonder if you should have a chiffon—or a lace train ?'

The fitter and one of the principals were much interested in this beautiful and totally unconscious débutante. All the items of her toilette were arranged and exhaustively discussed, without the slightest reference to the girl's own wishes, and Milly believed that she had some taste, and had expected to have a voice in the choice of her toilettes ; but any such hope was soon dissipated : everything was to be exactly as her mother selected, and everything was guaranteed to be *très distingué et très chic*. A ball gown, a little dinner frock, and an afternoon costume, were in turn selected and ordered. It was one o'clock when the fitting and conference had come to an end. The dressmaker and one or two of the lady assistants stared after the girl, as she passed out. Possibly the beauty of the season ? Well, there was some credit in making toilettes for such as her !

As mother and daughter drove off together, the former said—

'We may as well lunch at Searcy's to save time, and then the first thing you must get is a *hat*.'

'But won't this one do ? I am so proud of it. It cost a hundred francs.'

'Oh no, my poor child ; why, it 's like a bewitched lamp shade, and too wild and bizarre for words ! I saw people gazing at it at Rookes', and I must confess that I 'm not surprised.'

This remark was met by a blank silence, and

foolish Milly, looking out of the carriage window, presently winked away two tears.

The hat shop was visited and two models were selected. Milly's impassioned entreaty for 'an angel of a black crinoline, with a wreath of roses' was dismissed with lifted brows. 'No, she was not allowed to have it, nor her own way in anything—even in the selection of her gloves!—and began to fear that her darling mum had forgotten that she was no longer a child !

That same evening, Mrs. Trafford entertained a little theatre dinner of eight, and Milly, in a simple white frock, her hair dressed by a French coiffeur, was introduced to several of her mother's intimates. Sir Lucas Wakefield, a debonnaire bachelor of fifty-five with a refined face and pince-nez, who cultivated sedate friendships with women; Lord Finglass, a stout officer in the Blues, afflicted with small black eyes and a shiny complexion; Lady Brunhilda and Mr. Sampson. Lady Brunhilda was an animated fair lady, who wore magnificent pearls, a scandalously low dress, and entertained political celebrities. Mr. Sampson, an enormously wealthy young man whose grandfather (it was whispered) had made a fortune under a disguised name as a notable money-lender. Then there were Lord and Lady Foxrock, he a poor peer, crippled with a barren estate and heavy death duties, she the gay and handsome widow of a great manufacturer.

Dinner was excellent—and short, as is the fashion—the wine and waiting left nothing to be desired. It was a delightful novelty to Milly, who looked, listened, and would gladly have talked; but most of the conversation was beyond her reach—health cures, a new play, a new palmist, the odds on races, and certain Stock Exchange rumours, were the topics brought forward and discussed. The guests had naturally expected the daughter of Valeria Trafford to be good-looking, but this girl's appearance gave

them the unusual sensation of a surprise. What a brilliant animated face—truly, a radiant beauty—and she possessed an even greater charm, a freshness, an innocence, the indescribable aura of happiness so rare to meet! As two of the men subsequently agreed, ‘She was bound to give them all the knock—Mrs. Trafford was safe to enter her for some big matrimonial stake—yes, and bring it off too!’

Milly, was seated next to Lord Finglass, a silent, heavy man, accustomed to be flattered and entertained; he was considerably piqued to find that this good-looking girl made no effort to amuse him—actually no attempt to address him beyond a request for the salted almonds! She confined her conversation to Mr. Sampson, a more agreeable neighbour, who told her about the play they were to see that evening, and various other plays then running, related amusing anecdotes, inquired if she were going to Sandown? suggested winners and offered her the box-seat on his drag for the Meet of the Coaching Club. His wife, he assured her, was terribly nervous, and would only be too thankful to yield her place to another.

At the Haymarket theatre, many eyes were fixed on Mrs. Trafford’s party, and when the play was over, and they all adjourned to supper at the Carlton, many heads were turned as they entered; people at other tables whispered and stared; later, as Mrs. and Miss Trafford passed through the Palm Court to their electric brougham, a personage of importance accosted the former with bland smiles, and requested her to present him to her daughter! This was the beginning of Milly’s triumphs, and the close of her mother’s long day. To Mrs. Trafford no words could express the bitterness of her feelings; to stand aside and witness the attentions and homage she once received as her due, now showered upon her companion with lavish display—and Milly accepted her triumphs so simply! She did not appear to realize

that she was what is called 'the rage,' that long and vainly coveted invitations now came pouring into the letter box at Queen Street, that it was the fashion to secure (if possible) the presence of 'the beautiful Miss Trafford' at smart functions, where she was as much an attraction as a bare-footed dancer, or the most costly vocalist. Her mother, however, weeded these cards with a discriminating hand, determined that the star of a season should not make herself vulgarly cheap !

At the opera, at Ranelagh, or in the Park, the admiring glances so long Mrs. Trafford's due, were now directed to her companion ; she was compelled to walk beside her, a social martyr, suffering all the tortures of wounded vanity, yet forced to wear a delighted expression of maternal complacency. Until now, the miserable woman had never realized her own insatiable greed for admiration. For years it had been a nonchalantly accepted right, and behold this joy—this, the very salt of her life--was carelessly snatched from her by her own child ! Congratulations were forced on her by men and women. Lord Bynx, glancing from mother to daughter, had aptly quoted—

‘Thou art thy mother’s glass, and she in thee  
Calls back the lovely April of her prime ;’

and even Sir Lucas Wakefield and General Morland, her own special friends, were devoted to Milly ; and Milly was so quick, she picked up bridge and learnt to smoke cigarettes in no time ; she was an excellent pianist, and rode and danced to perfection. Oh, if she could only get married ! but Milly refused to listen to the right sort of people, and did not appear to care for love ; she was far too gay, too full of vitality, and the spirit of youth.

Mrs. Trafford’s coldness, her strength of will, and her insistence on ruling her daughter’s tastes, choosing her friends and keeping her in painfully tight

leading strings, gradually had their effect. By slow degrees, the cold truth dawned on the poor girl. Her mother did not love her—no, nor even dear old Phil. Mummy so rarely wrote to him, and one of his letters had lain unopened for three whole days ! Her mother's despotism was serene, suspicious and extreme ; she tolerated no chattering young friends. Milly might not accept invitations to little informal luncheons, or summon another girl up to the box-room to have a nice comfortable talk—such as all young women enjoy. No, there were notes to write, flowers to arrange, sewing, practising, shopping, then the park, luncheon, calls, At Homes, dinners, concerts, and dances. It was one incessant whirling round that left her giddy ! feeling that she had no individuality, no mind of her own, and was simply a mere bundle of animated chiffons !

As the season waned, it was whispered that poor dear Valeria Trafford was positively in *despair* ! Her girl could—and she would—have married brilliantly ; but she steadily refused more than one excellent offer. Her suitors were invariably too old or too young, or too something ; she declared herself deeply honoured, but preferred to remain Milly Trafford.

Early in August, the mother and daughter departed to make a round of visits in Scotland ; Milly was a born country girl, with country tastes, capital at games, at gardening, and a sound authority on the ailments of indoor pets ; bright, spontaneous, easily amused, and not the least conceited or self-conscious —she proved an exceedingly popular guest.

From time to time she wrote long letters to Phil, and sent him papers that had published her picture, with flattering descriptions of herself, her triumphs, and her dress—which papers her brother somewhat shyly exhibited to Scruby and Miss Hampton.

At one of the country houses, she made acquaintance with another girl, a certain Miss Moffatt. They walked with the guns, exchanged the mysteries of

new stitches and card games, sat in one another's rooms, and talked ; simple Milly soon gathered, that other young women enjoyed far more freedom than fell to her share ; they chose their clothes, cultivated their own particular friends, and went to tea or lunch at one another's houses without let or hindrance.

'Your mother keeps you pretty strictly,' remarked Miss Moffatt ; 'she is not used to girls, I fancy ; and is in the bridge and racing set with people of her own age. By the way, every one knows that Lord Bynx is wild about you ! Why on earth don't you marry him ?'

'He is so old—he must be over fifty,' objected Milly.

'But so rich, and so well preserved. They say he is immensely clever ; he has a lovely place in Oxfordshire.'

'Yes, but he breathes through his nose and is frightfully greedy,' objected the beauty. 'No, I really could not marry him.'

'Then there is Captain Digby—good-looking, and amusing.'

'Yes, I rather liked him—till—'

'Till ?'

'I saw him one night we were having supper at the Savoy. He looked so red in the face, his eyes were so glassy—and he had a most appalling young woman with him.'

'Oh, my dear, we girls are never supposed to see those sort of things.'

'But I'm afraid I must always see what is under my nose.'

'Then what are you going to do, if you will not accept any of these eligibles ? Of course, your mother is most frightfully disappointed.'

'Yes, I'm afraid she is, and I'm sorry ; but you see it's my life, and to have to spend all the rest of my days with some one I simply couldn't endure—think of it ? I'd really sooner be dead !'

On the other hand, Mrs. Trafford poured her bitter

lamentations into the ear of her neighbour, Mrs. Wallingford, who secretly sympathized with the girl.

'Oh, my dear Lally,' she said, 'I don't know *how* I am to go on with this, and get through the winter and another season. My heart really sinks. If you only knew how Milly tries me; she is so impetuous, reckless and foolish. Now she has taken up with Lady Lamb, and is always running to her; and she is so extravagant and untidy and careless—in my little house it drives the servants wild, her gloves and veils and hatpins all over the place, and she has struck up a wonderful friendship with those two stupid Moffatt girls.'

'Well, they are warranted harmless and respectable!'

'Come, Lally, now what do you honestly think of Milly?'

'I think, what I've always thought, that she is a beautiful, good young creature, full of energy and high spirits, longing to have her little fling and set herself going! You keep her so tightly bitted, and she only meets elderly people, and eligibles.'

'Eligibles that she won't look at! Why, she was positively rude to Lord Goldpinch.'

'Then she treated herself to a luxury I wish I dared enjoy. I cannot endure him or his manners. The child is getting just a little bit spoiled, a little slangy, she smokes too many cigarettes, and is at last realizing the power of her beauty. She is past twenty now. I think she was a little bit hurt, that you did not remember her birthday. Do you know that she cried about it to me?'

'Silly little idiot! She will be only too glad some day to forget—as I do—that she has a birthday at all!'

This conversation took place late in October shortly after Mrs. Trafford had returned to town, and taken her house out of curl papers, and was pre-

paring to enjoy the autumn season, when most people are at home, and socially inclined.

Invitations to a grand ball at the Hotel Ritz had been issued by a wealthy American lady, and Mrs. Trafford exerted herself to an unusual degree in the selection of her toilette for the occasion. She really was looking her best, she said to herself, as she surveyed her reflection (a dazzling vision in amethyst draperies) in a cheval glass.

The ball proved as delightful as had been anticipated. Everything that money and taste could contrive had been accomplished ; the wonderfully decorated rooms were crowded, and Milly was, as usual, beset by clamouring partners. Mrs. Trafford too had received a cordial welcome from many of her intimates, and anxious inquiries as to how and where she had spent the autumn ? Indeed, so propitious was the occasion, so *empressé* her reception, that she felt herself re-established in her original position, and among her particular circle once more supreme ! She went in to supper with Colonel Granville, A.D.C. to the King, and one of her attachés —a distinguished officer with numerous decorations and a pair of handsome sleepy eyes. They found themselves at the same table with Lord Scarcliff (one of Mrs. Trafford's adherents), Lady Foxrock, and a young couple of her acquaintance. Here she took the lead in conversation, and absorbed the exclusive attention of the party. She was gay and amusing, and really did look magnificent—it seemed just like old times (that is to say, dating back about six months).

Presently another pair came to the table ; these proved to be Milly and a Guardsman—both slightly breathless from a long supper dance. Immediately there was a move, a little stir, as the girl took her place, and nodded to her mother and Lady Foxrock. Mrs. Trafford's animation faded ; she became instantly conscious that a cloud had intervened between her and the sun ! No, unfortunately it was not

imagination ; it was the world's instinctive homage to beauty. Lord Scarcliff leant across and eagerly reminded Miss Trafford of his waltz—the next but one ; Lady Foxrock beamed and said, ‘ Milly, my dear, I am counting on you to lead the Cotillon at my boy and girl dance on the 10th—*no* chaperones ! ’ and she shook her head at Milly’s mother.

Each member of the party seemed anxious to claim the young lady’s attention, and how she chattered, and how really brilliant she looked ! not the least heated or ruffled—not a hair out of place. Milly had the happy knack of personal neatness—although her room was perfectly disgraceful ! Yes, in her chiffon and silver frock, with her white teeth shining between her laughing red lips, long lashes sweeping her delicate cheek, she eclipsed every one in the room. Her mother was painfully conscious of this, and that her own trusty cavalier now accorded her but divided attention. He, Lord Scarcliff and the Guardsman, were devoting themselves exclusively to Milly, and she herself had actually made two important remarks and received no reply—her voice being drowned in an animated discussion over her daughter’s programme. Such defection was bitter indeed ! She felt neglected and ignored, oh, it was an intolerable experience ! Draining her glass of champagne, Mrs. Trafford threw herself back in her chair, and abandoned further effort. Her face suddenly became aged, white and rigid, as she realized that at last the sceptre had passed from her hand !

Sir Lucas Wakefield, meeting from a distance her restless, miserable eyes, came up and claimed her, as the supper party scattered. Had Sir Lucas the spirit of divination ? or was it purely by accident that on that evening, in a dim, sequestered seat, he put his fate to the touch for the third time ?

Next morning Mrs. Wallingford was astonished by an early visit from her neighbour ; something

important, some powerful influence must have dragged her out of bed before ten o'clock in the day !

' Lally, I 've something to consult you about,' Mrs. Trafford began. ' Sir Lucas Wakefield was at the ball last night. You know we are old friends. I think he sees that I am not very happy about things, and he has asked me to marry him—it 's not the first time. I said I 'd consider it—what do you think ? '

' Well, he is a presentable man—and suitable—and has a good fortune,' replied her friend, after a weighty silence.

' But he is only a K.C.B. ! '

' Never mind ; you will be *Lady* Wakefield, and it sounds important—but what about Milly ? '

' He likes her, admires her, is, in fact, raving about her, and says he will be more than a second father and take her about, and be so proud of her.'

' Um — yes,' Mrs. Wallingford's acquiescence sounded doubtful.

' I do not intend to give up my own home. Sir Lucas has no house—nothing but a flat in Whitehall Mansions.'

' And next-door there is not room for three,' observed her neighbour, nodding her head sagaciously.

' No, even two are a tight fit ! I shall have to turn the lounge downstairs into a dressing-room.'

' Then I suppose you have some plan ? '

' Yes. I could not sleep, my brain was so active, and I got up early to come in and consult with you. You see Milly is terribly wild and intractable—she will not marry. There is not the slightest use in trying to force her ; unless she meets some one she falls in love with, she will be an old maid. She and Philip are tremendously fond of one another—and —her tone became distinctly apologetic as she added—' I was thinking of letting her go out to *him* for awhile.'

'But, my dear, isn't he in the jungle?' inquired her friend, with a startled expression.

'Oh no; Chandi is not a big place, but there are other people. They seem to be nice, friendly, simple folk. This morning I threw out a hint, and Milly simply flung herself on the idea—you know her way! Now what do you say?'

'That three is trumpery, two is company! As you cannot get the girl married, you are going to get married yourself. Valeria, I believe you are wise; Milly will never settle down a tame little creature to be sold in the marriage market. She is not a girl to fall in love yet—not susceptible—but when she does, it will be an unexpected sort of choice, and—believe me—she will go in headlong!'

'Yes, just as she bursts into a room, or a friendship,' added her mother sourly.

'It has seemed to me that the present life is a severe strain on you both: though you do keep up appearances so charmingly. Yes—send the girl off to India with a nice little outfit, a saddle and some pretty frocks—she may meet her ideal, and pick up some one out there.'

'She may! Who knows—some nobody—a planter or a penniless subaltern, and the girl positively *did* refuse Lord Bynx. Sir Lucas wants the wedding to be very quiet and to go South before Christmas—on account of his bronchitis.'

'I see; and this, of course, is the Indian cold weather—you could not possibly send the child there in the hot season. If she does not embark before January, she must wait till this time next year. So—with one of her knowing looks—'I imagine she will start without unnecessary delay!'

'You are right, Lally,' declared Mrs. Trafford, rising as she spoke. 'You always *do* take in details so thoroughly. I'll dispatch my answer to Sir Lucas by a messenger boy, and I'll speak to Milly immediately. The trousseau and outfit can be set

in hand at the same time, and I'll order them together.'

'Two birds with one stone!' exclaimed Mrs Wallingford. 'Well, good luck to you both!'

## CHAPTER XX

### EXPECTATION AND CONFLAGRATION

HERE is the letter to her brother in which Milly Trafford announced her approaching visit:—

'DEAR OLD PHIL,—Pull yourself together, and prepare for two pieces of extra special news. Firstly, "a marriage has been arranged"—no, not mine. The mater is about to become Lady Wakefield. Sir Lucas, a dear old thing, has long been waiting for her consent, and now she has accorded it—better late than never! It is to be a quiet wedding, and they will spend the honeymoon at Cannes. News number two, I am going out to stay with *you*. You remember how you always talked of this plan, and the great times we would have together. You have not said so much about it lately—I dare say you are afraid that I am a smart society damsel, who cannot live without a maid, and a motor, and a couple of little dogs, but that is not me at all. I am as silly and simple as ever! and anyway, I'm coming, and my passage is taken in the *Moldavia*, 1st December, so I'll be in nice time for Christmas. Oh, dear old boy, I get up and jig about the room, when I think of seeing you after nearly four years. I hope you haven't grown a beard? anyway, if you have, don't let me see it. This scheme was only arranged to-day, after the mater had broken the news of her engagement: and as this house is tiny for two, much less three, she suggested a visit to you, and naturally I

jumped at the proposal. The wedding is to be on the 30th November. I've insisted on staying to see the mater married—she who was so keen to see me married! She will look splendid in brown velvet and sables. I am so glad she is marrying Sir Lucas. I was afraid of old General Morland, a man I could not endure, and always felt inclined to throw things at. He was so cynical and sneering. Well, mother and I are going to do no end of shopping, and will be immensely busy. Please let me hear by return what I may, and may not take out—of course, my saddle and my Court dress—it's simply ripping—in case I go up to a drawing-room in Calcutta. Send me the size of Henry's neck, for a nice collar from his auntie. You know I shall soon have three hundred a year now; so I won't be a burden on your finances, but will make you over £200 for the common purse. Yes, I shall!'

[‘Silly little fool, as if I’d take it!’ he ejaculated.]

‘Ta, ta, dearest old Phil, I hope you are not changed, and love the same things as I do, buttered toast, tennis, and raspberry tarts. *Je t’embrasse de toute mon cœur.* Your wildly, wildly happy sister,

‘MILICENT VERNON TRAFFORD’

The autograph was inscribed in enormous letters.

The news of Miss Trafford’s impending visit spread through the little station within an hour. It was first announced in the Club reading-room by Maguire, who had it from Scruby, who had it from headquarters. The young lady was expected before Christmas—in less than a month’s time!

‘What was she like? Had any one seen her portrait?’ inquired Chapman.

‘No, there was one on Trafford’s table—a flapper with her hair down—not bad-looking.’

‘Not bad-looking? Oh, well, we are fairly well off

for good looks here—though we are a jungly station !' and Gresham nodded at Lily Castellas, who was turning over a newly arrived picture paper. She drew in her chin, giggled delightedly and exclaimed—

' Oh my ! Captain Gresham, you *are* a funny man !'

As has already been mentioned, a piece of intelligence by letter eclipsed in interest the world's news brought by that day's Dâk ; an earthquake, a political crisis, the death of a great man, the birth of an heir to a throne—what were these little trivial matters in comparison to the great fact, that Miss Trafford was coming to Chandi !

' But why ? ' questioned Mrs. Heron, speaking in an undertone to Mrs. Baxter, ' such a little dull out-of-the-way jungly place ! No life, no society, nothing ; if I were a girl, I 'd rather go anywhere, and once Tom has made his little pile, Chandi will never, never see or hear of *me* again. There are no eligibles here. What *can* be her inducement ? '

' Why, her brother, of course ! I believe there are only two of them, and they are greatly attached. Mr. Trafford always gives me the idea of a young man who would have nice, well-brought-up sisters——'

' Because he goes to service on Sundays, when he is not shooting, and gives you money for your orphans.'

' I also think,' continued Mrs. Baxter, ignoring the suggestion, ' that the girl may like to see the real Indian life ; instead of a racketty cantonment, or a big hill station with four posts a day, and dances every night. Here, she will have the beautiful forests, the primitive people at home in the fields and villages, the wild jungle flowers, the sense I enjoy myself—of happy retirement and holy peace.'

' Ah ! ' said Mrs. Heron, with a flash of her dark eyes, suddenly leaning forward in her chair, ' you have given me the clue, you good simple woman ! Miss Trafford is descending on her brother at a week

or two's notice. He is as much flabbergasted as any one! She is coming to bury herself in the jungle—because—ahem—she has got into some shocking scrape at home!

'Oh, my dear Mrs. Heron,' protested Mrs. Baxter with a pink face, 'now, now, now, you know we should think no evil.'

'Yes, but how on earth can we help it! When the evil is planted down before us? What else could be the common-sense reason for this extraordinary visit! Why should a girl who has, I believe, been admired last season in London, come and suddenly precipitate herself into the most out of the way district in India? As to her brother, it's all humbug—a blind. Why, I've a brother in Barcelona; I've not seen him for twenty years and don't want to! I would not recognize him if we did meet—and I tell you this, between ourselves, I shall not be in any hurry to receive Miss Trafford until I have made *inquiries*,' and before Mrs. Baxter could recover her breath, she rose and went over to the other side of the reading-table, and entrenched herself in an arm-chair, behind the new *Queen*.

It was gratifying to notice the little preparations that were set on foot in order to make a favourable impression on the stranger. A new set of tennis balls were ordered, a new brown club teapot, as well as red caps for the tennis boys.

It was now the beginning of the cold weather; occasional tourists arrived at the Dâk bungalow in powerful roomy motors, remained for a few days, shot a couple of black buck, strolled through the bazaar, inspected the temple of Mahadeo, and afterwards talked with weighty authority of Indian jungle life. At this season the district looked to Chandi to bestir itself, give entertainments, tennis, and billiard and bridge tournaments, yea, and dances! The Brights, a family of four, were subscribers, and naturally expected to get something for their money;

there were the two girls Bellina and Evelina, known as 'good' Miss Bright, and 'pretty' Miss Bright, and two dark brothers; Sam, who was nicknamed 'Sawmy,' and 'Booby,' who chaperoned their relatives, and were both passionately fond of dancing and society. Mr. Bright was engaged in the coal mines, and mamma was reported to be too stout to fit into any bullock tonga in the Central Provinces! in fact, she was dubbed the Black Mountain by ill-natured Chapman—who had a flair for nicknames. Besides the Brights, there were the Frasers and their girls, two clever sandy-haired sisters, and several other outlying families. People came from quite a flattering distance for the Chandi week; there were sports, and a dance; the Rajah and P.W.D. provided tents, and every one lent all they could spare, down to their very last sheet and teaspoon. And now a wicked little whisper circulated in the place. Fortunately, it did not reach Scruby, the Doctor or Maguire—but it said 'that there must be some screw loose about Trafford's sister! otherwise a smart London society girl would never come and bury herself in the jungle!'

Another interesting matter of purely local interest was freely and openly canvassed. Pahari was no more! Chapman, riding by, was thunderstruck to find that the well-known, desolate landmark had been totally obliterated! Nothing remained but an immense black blot; the bungalow had been totally destroyed by fire, and not even a board or rafter was left—only among the rank green grass, a sable patch of burnt ground, and one or two heaps of grey ashes.

Naturally it was concluded that this was the work of an incendiary—a pleasant little way of paying back the forest Conservator, for the harrying and hustling to which the poor shikari folk, and horn-hunters, had been submitted; but on search and inquiry—personally conducted by the forest officer,

and prosecuted with remarkable zeal—evidence declared that the burning had taken place on a certain hopelessly wet night, when any ordinary fire must have assuredly been extinguished ; also, that no flames were visible, although such a conflagration of rotten timber would have illuminated the country for twenty miles !

Trafford was hopelessly puzzled. On the other hand, the native guards were for once unanimous, and confidently declared that ‘the destruction and burning was doubtless the work of devils.’

The stables and cook-houses subsequently disappeared—were carried off piecemeal, with miraculous rapidity. Villagers who required material for their cattle sheds and enclosures came in hordes (in the daytime) ; the door fastenings, the well lid, and the very curry stone, were eagerly appropriated.

Presently, with the incredible speed of tropical vegetation, Pahari was overgrown ; a great matted tangle of the snaky tendrils of a giant creeper sprang from its ashes, and covered its site as with a mantle. Before long, passers-by would point indifferently and say—

‘There was once a forest bungalow somewhere hereabouts,’ but soon the very name of Pahari, its history and its tragedies, will be submerged in the jungle and oblivion.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE FIRST MISS TRAFFORD

THERE were marvellous changes in Trafford’s little home, for he with the ‘House Man’s’ permission and Scruby’s active assistance, had added an office, so that Milly might have a drawing-room, all the doors were newly oiled, the walls coloured,

floors matted, a good Kampti ayah engaged, and a carriage set up in the shape of a tonga or 'cow' cart—the vehicle of the C.P. This resembles a Croydon with the roof of a bathing machine, and is drawn by trotting bullocks, harnessed at either side of a stout pole, on which the driver sits, urging the beasts by loud imperious queries and shouts of encouragement—as well as a certain amount of severe tail twisting. The little bullocks are not particularly easy to drive, can trot at a surprising pace and even run away. Trafford always rode, and had never owned such a luxury, but he, Scruby, and the Castellas, were the sole exception in Chandi. Besides her tonga for rainy weather, Mrs. Heron had a smart pony trap, and was contemplating the purchase of a motor, or 'devil gharry.'

Trafford had departed to meet his sister in Calcutta; the Kennedys were also there, and Miss Trafford was to stay at Karwassa for the usual few days, afterwards she and her brother would return home for Christmas.

Milly had arrived in raptures with all her experiences; bubbling over with youth, high spirits, and a novel sense of freedom. Mrs. Kennedy chaperoned her to the 'Saturday club,' and other dances, where the new 'spin' made an immediate sensation. During the early mornings, she and her brother drove about shopping and buying all manner of articles necessary and unnecessary for the little far-away bungalow. A piano of course; lamps, and pretty china, rugs, an English sofa, tea-table, and quantities of phoolcarries, and native draperies. These were a fresh delight to the stranger, who invested in a number of all sizes and colours, whilst Philip looked on doubtfully and said, 'Oh yes, very fine now—but after you've seen them everywhere—you'll get beastly sick of them,' and although Miss Milly had brought out a stock of the latest fashions (of her own choice exclusively) she added a most expensive hat

to her collection. Trafford stood by dumbfounded at the price.

'Ah,' coolly trying it on him despite his blushes and expostulations, 'you little know what dress costs! Wait till you are married! The hat the mater went away in cost twelve guineas, but was quite too ducky for words, and she looked perfectly lovely. I told you I had a line to Port Said; they are having such a good time—you know the Caswells have lent their villa and motor.'

'I declare, Milly, to hear you one would suppose that you were the parent, and had just married off a girl.'

'Yes, dear; you see, everything is upside down nowadays; daughters manage and educate their mothers—and if widows, get them settled. Not that I did anything of the kind with ours. Look here, I've a great mind to have that red hat! You see, I never can decide. "Doomed is the double mind"—and once away in Chandi, I *know* I shall not be able to sleep, with longing for it.'

'No, Milly, no more hats!' and he hurried her out; 'you can never wear half you've got—you might start a shop. No one wears anything but topees and sailor hats—such a thing as you have on your head, would bring all the peacocks out of the jungle.'

'How dare you call my lovely hat "a thing"! you rude boy! This is a work of art—and came from the atelier of L'Entèrique in Paris.'

'All right, I'm no judge; but after the rains at Chandi, I bet you L'Entèrique herself won't know it.'

'What a hideous prophecy—and why not, pray?'

'I fancy the damp won't agree with those machines—the gold bobs and the white fluff—its end will be the theatrical wardrobe, and a find for Scruby.'

'You are a horrid, depressing, odious brother,' giving him a nip. 'I intend to revel in the damp and everything else about Chandi, and I hope Chandi is going to like me?'

‘No fear of that, old girl, though at first I expect you’ll take their breath away with your smart frocks and hats. You might go a bit slow at first—and let them down easy.’

Trafford was immensely proud of his sister—just the same jolly old Milly, only grown into such a beauty, that sometimes he felt almost awestruck when he looked at her.

Whilst brother and sister were enjoying themselves at Karwassa, playing tennis and croquet : and talking and singing, Milly helping Mrs. Kennedy to garden, listening to all manner of housekeeping instructions, and making her way further and further into that kind woman’s heart—a certain little comedy was being enacted at Chandi. It was no secret to Scruby that his superior officer had ordered a smart new suit from Calcutta ; also such weapons for conquest as shoes, ties, and various bottles of scent and brilliantine. Unquestionably Maguire was a very vain man, and believed himself to be an irresistible lady-killer ; in short, that a girl had, as far as he was concerned, merely to ‘look and die.’ If Trafford’s sister was as handsome as her brother, and if she had a little money of her own—as was most likely—it was about time for him to think of settling, and she might *do* !

The subtle Scruby, who had divined these ideas, received his chief at the early morning tennis with arms widespread like an animated sign-post, and announced with dramatic *empressement*, ‘She has come !’

‘What, bless my soul !’ exclaimed Maguire. Why, yes, of course they were expected last night. Have you seen her ?’

‘No ; I give my betters a chance !’

‘Well,’ said Maguire, reflectively twisting his moustache, ‘I believe I’ll look in this afternoon—Trafford would expect it—eh ?’

‘Why, yes, of course ; about five—just give her time to unpack.’

'They had a long journey round by rail from the Kennedys' to Dongar.'

'Better than thirty miles "as the cock crows" of a jungle ride anyway,' said Scruby flippantly. 'I believe I'll call this afternoon too—nothing like getting a flying start, is there?'

'About five, did you say? All right.'

At five o'clock precisely, Mr. Maguire's best pony halted at the Traffords' 'koti,' and Mr. Maguire, in a brand-new suit, patent leather shoes, green silk socks, and a panama hat, shouted the usual summons, and subsequently asked 'If the Miss Sahib was at home?'

To his astonishment, Chapman came into the verandah, and said, 'Yes; come along in, old man.'

Maguire took off his hat, smoothed his back hair, put his hand to his tie, and entered. The room was rather dark, for all the chicks were down. A lady wearing a long travelling coat, a motor cap, and smart blue gauze veil jauntily knotted under her chin, half rose to receive him. She was fair, tall, and looked pretty, with very black eyebrows and a wonderfully fine colour—such a contrast to poor washed-out Anglo-Indians.

'I am delighted to see you, Miss Trafford,' he said, extending an eager hand. 'You are as welcome here as the flowers in May! Another young lady, and one like yourself—er—will be a valuable addition to our little community.'

He had composed this speech *en route*, and now offered it with a bow.

'So very kind of you to say so, Mr. Maguire. I'm so awfully pleased to see you,' she answered in a cheerful voice. 'I've often heard of you from my brother—he is out just now. He told me such nice things about you!'

Maguire coloured, fidgeted uneasily in his chair, and gave a little chuckling laugh—sure sign of supreme satisfaction.

'Do you know that he told me—but no—I really must not flatter you. May I give you some tea?' As she held up the teapot, she glanced at him coquettishly.

He nodded, and beamed assent.

'Of course you take sugar?' fumbling with a common glass sugar bowl; 'all nice men do. You see our new kit has not arrived yet, but in a few days we shall be settled.'

'Did you have a pleasant passage out, Miss Trafford?'

'Well, to tell you the truth, I cannot say I had—such a dull elderly set—no bridge—no dances—only think,' raising a forcible forefinger, 'not *one* flirtation!'

'Oh—then—er—you don't disapprove of that sort of thing?' moving his chair nearer and speaking in a confidential key.

'Why, certainly not,' with unexpected emphasis; 'why should I? A most harmless and amusing way of spending the time!'

'Do you think so?' (Why did Chapman sit there slowly sipping tea, dumb as a fish?) 'Harmless, no doubt, to you—but what about poor unfortunate fellows—like *me*, for instance?—play to you, death to them! I'm a miserably lonely bachelor, and terribly susceptible—seeing that I'm Irish,' and he threw her a glance, that was at once whimsical and lugubrious.

'Yes, I know you are Irish—you have such a delicious brogue! I am so fond of Irish traits, and devoted to Irish people. But how strange that you are unscathed until now?'

'That is true,' heaving a sigh, and putting down his cup. 'Perhaps I have been waiting for my fate—who knows?'

As he gazed at her expressively, Miss Trafford's countenance suddenly exhibited queer twitches and spasms, and Chapman, hitherto an unsympathetic listener, was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

'I suppose you ride, Miss Trafford?' inquired the visitor after a pause of surprise.

'Ride, oh yes—rather—I should say so—I love it!' she replied; 'there's nothing like it.'

'She has brought out her saddle,' chimed in Chapman; 'rides like a man, wears divided skirt—the latest "jim"—all the go at home.'

'Oh, indeed!' murmured Maguire, looking rather blank. 'I was going to say I've a really capital pony that carries a lady—but—er—'

'Thank you awfully, Mr. Maguire. Even if I do ride astride, I hope I am still quite—er—feminine—and all that sort of thing—and I am delighted to accept your offer.'

As she spoke she tendered a white, but good-sized hand, which Maguire did not quite know what to do with, but eventually decided to raise to his lips—where it remained, nearly buried in his moustache. Miss Trafford now, for all her self-confidence, became suddenly agitated. She choked convulsively, then gathered herself together, and with her handkerchief to her face, rose, exclaiming—

'Do you know, I feel the heat already. I—I—really—must ask you to excuse me—for to-day.'

'Oh, I'm awfully sorry—what can I do?' jumping up with great alacrity. 'Water—or—or—brandy—do let me run for some?'

'No, no, no,' interposed Chapman, speaking in a smothered voice with a very red face; 'it's all right.' As Miss Trafford turned towards him with heaving shoulders, '*Ayah ko bolao!*' he shouted, and with the assistance of his arm the lady tottered towards the purdah, and disappeared.

'Well, I declare! She seems to be getting hysterics, or some sort of fit,' said Maguire; 'she looked so strong, and so much at home, only a moment ago. Poor girl! Do you think she'll be all right—or shall I just gallop over and bring Collins?'

'No. It's nothing at all,' declared Chapman,

with decision. ‘ Girls hate to be fussed with. I expect it’s only just a crumb that went the wrong way ! She’ll be as right as a trivet in five minutes —you and I may as well clear—as *we’re* no good here.’

That evening after dinner the bridge people were astonished to learn that Maguire—first in the field—had called on, and had the honour of drinking tea with, Miss Trafford !

‘ Why, I’d a line from him,’ said the Doctor, ‘ and he says they are not coming till to-morrow ; he cannot tear his sister away from the Kennedys, and they refuse to let her go.’

‘ They’ve let her go all right ! ’ announced Maguire with pompous complacency, putting down as he spoke a No Trumper dummy. ‘ She’s in the station ; and I never wish for a better cup of tea than the one she gave me with her own two hands.’

‘ What is she like ? ’ asked Gresham and Heron in one breath.

‘ You’ve come to the right shop, and *I’m* the man to tell you ! ’ declared Maguire, and his countenance beamed with the sublime consciousness of knowing more than the herd. ‘ She’s tall and bigger made than you’d expect ; a fine, dashing, upstanding young woman, with a grand pair of eyes, and a splendid complexion ; very affable, lots to say for herself. She’s going to borrow Joss, my pony. I’ll send him over in the morning, and escort the lady myself.’

‘ Well done, Maguire ! ’ ejaculated Heron ; ‘ nothing like being the first in the field.’

‘ I can’t make it out,’ muttered Dr. Collins. ‘ It’s funny ; I passed this afternoon, and it struck me that, only for cook-house and stables, there wasn’t a sign of life in the bungalow. Well, well, partner, may I play to No Trumps ? ’

## CHAPTER XXII

## A PARDON

THE audacious escapade of Scruby and Chapman was nearly costing the former gentleman his promotion. That his subordinate officer, Scruby—a mad fool always—should dare to play tricks on him—Maguire—and one of *the Maguires*)—dress up, make tea, and pass himself off as Trafford's sister, why, it was simply outrageous ! Maguire's naturally fiery temper was dangerously inflamed ; he had worked himself up into a condition bordering on frenzy, and he really looked a formidable person—even in white flannel pyjamas with broad green stripes—when Dr. Collins approached him in the character of an emissary and peace-maker. Maguire's vanity had received a mortal wound ; that his own underling should dare to take such a liberty ; that he, Maguire, had actually stooped to kiss that underling's hand ! Why, at the mere recollection he figuratively foamed at the mouth. And how the station would laugh and chaff !

' I tell you, Collins, I must draw the line somewhere,' he declared, striding up and down the verandah in clapping bathroom slippers, ' must and will. I 'm altogether too slack and easy-going, too kind-hearted with my subordinates, and this,' waving his arms, ' is the result. Scruby makes a fool of me to my face, and before the whole station ! Well, I 've drafted a strong report—and it goes to-morrow. I promise you on my solemn word of honour that Master Scruby will have no more chances of playing his pranks here—and that 's as sure as me name is Kevin Maguire. I 'll run him out of the place ! '

' He is awfully penitent, Maguire, really and truly very sorry. You know how fond he is of dressing up

and acting and mimicking. The Traffords having put off their arrival for two days, gave him the idea. He borrowed some things from Mrs. Heron—he did not say for what—and Chapman dressed him !'

' Such an infernal liberty with the Traffords, too ! '

' Oh, well, you know what pals he and Trafford are, almost living together, and the house was empty ; he sent over his own bearer with the tea. Come now, Maguire, just look over it this time. I grant you, it was the most impudent thing I ever heard of in all my life ; but young men will be young men ! Why, I remember you 've told me fine tales of your own escapades in Dublin.'

' Scruby told me a deliberate lie—that is the worst of it ; he said, " She has arrived." '

' Yes, but he declares that he mentioned no names—and " she " might have arrived—a cat, or a cow ! '

• ' Collins, I 'm astonished at you ! 'Pon my soul, I am ! a man of your age and sense, countenancing such shuffling of words and quibbling,' and he surveyed him sternly.

' But don't we all do that ? ' asked the Doctor, unabashed.

' No, by George ! Anyway I do not.'

' Oh, well, of course, you are a strong man, Maguire, and can afford to overlook the vagaries and follies of weaker people. Remember, Scruby is a first-rate officer—keen, active—steady as old Time——'

' Steady ! ' shouted Maguire.

' Oh, you know what I mean ; though he does play the fool about the station. Give him another chance, old man,' and he walked up and laid his hand on his shoulder. ' Don't send off that report yet—as you are strong—be merciful.'

Maguire gnawed his moustache viciously, but all the same he was flattered, his *amour propre* was mollified, he liked to be assured that he was a ' strong man.'

' You know,' resumed the Doctor, ' it has not got out. When I smelt a rat, I went straight to Scruby and spoke to him seriously. Not a soul knows but you and I—and Chapman.'

' But I spoke of it at the Club ! ' objected Maguire ; ' there is no getting over that ! '

' My dear fellow, they all thought it was one of your pleasant Irish jokes. I assure you it 's a dead secret (a secret discovered by Mrs. Heron that subsequently went round the whole district), ' and the Traffords come to-morrow. Don't let the girl find us having a big row in the station and her brother's best friend in disgrace. Eh, Maguire—come now ? '

' Well—well—I 'll think it over,' replied Maguire after a reflective pause. (He felt a delightful consciousness of his own magnanimity and generosity glow within him.) ' And look here, Collins, tell that infernal young ass that he is not to come near me, or speak to me, for six months—that 's understood.'

But such was the happy result of the Doctor's diplomacy, and such is life in a limited circle, Maguire and his erring subordinate were playing Snookers together within a week.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE REAL MISS TRAFFORD

AT length anticipation was fulfilled—the real true and only Miss Trafford arrived in Chandi, and was driven up in state in a hooded cow-cart to her brother's neat little bungalow. The Miss Sahib looked radiant as she entered, and stood expectant on the threshold of a new existence—where she was received by a ceremonious company of salaaming domestics.

As soon as tea had been dispatched, she hurried from room to room, exclaiming, admiring, suggesting, and re-arranging ; in ten minutes she had altered the furniture in the stiff little drawing-room, banished a hideous chromo, and made friends with Henry—who was inclined to be not merely jealous but suspicious ! Then leaving Mary Ayah to unpack (and report on her character), she proceeded to make an outdoor inspection, and arm-in-arm with Philip visited the stables and garden, enchanted with all she beheld. Here everything was strange—the great oleanders, the orange trees laden with fruit, the stone irrigation channels, the odd well from which the Mali was raising water to flood the lucerne, the very feel of the air, the perfumes, the sounds—all were new to the new Miss Sahib, and she herself was a delightful novelty. The syces' little naked brown children, with marigolds stuck behind their ears, gazed at her awestruck and open-mouthed ; never in their short lives had they beheld anything so wonderful and beautiful as this tall lady with the smiling face and shining eyes.

After an appetizing little dinner, the traveller, who was tired, threw herself on the sofa, and proceeded to light a cigarette.

'*Hullo !*' exclaimed her brother, pausing in the doorway.

'Yes, I've never smoked at Karwassa. I was not sure if dear darling Aunt Aggie would approve. But of course, at home it is different. This is "homey." Oh, Phil, you can't imagine how happy I am !'

'That's all right, old girl. Of course this is your own house as much as it's mine—er—but this smoking—you know—is something new.'

'Oh yes, I took to it in London ! You must blame London, and you see the Mum smoked and Mrs. Wallingford, and lots of girls I know. I only smoke Virginia tobacco, and it really *does* soothe one.'

'Soothe you! What about Mrs. Winslow's Syrup?'

'Oh,' with an impatient wave of her hand, 'you know what I mean—when one has been tearing round in a constant rush—one's nerves—'

'One's what?'

'Well, *my* nerves get a bit on edge, and I found nothing so nice and restful as a cigarette. Out here, naturally, it becomes almost a duty—it keeps off the mosquitoes, and other obnoxious insects. See,' exhibiting a gold cigarette case, with a monogram in sapphires, 'Lord Bynx gave me this, as a parting gift.'

'Wasn't he the old fellow who wanted to marry you?'

'*Don't!*' with an impassioned gesture. 'Look here, Phil, I hope you realize that I am never going back to Queen Street—and that you will have me on your hands for all time.'

'So much the better, but I doubt it; and I say, Cis, I do hate to see a woman smoke.'

'Selfish wretch! I'd like to know how many pipes *you* smoke in the day? Let me remind you that what is sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose! And oh, by the way, do tell me about this famous Gosling of yours.'

'To-morrow you shall have an opportunity of judging for yourself.'

'To-morrow I shall be up at cock-crow, settle the drawing-room, get out my knick-knacks, and do the flowers—and the cook.'

'Mind you don't let him "do" you!'

'No; I've learnt quite a lot from Aunt Aggie, and picked up a little Hindustani, but not enough to scold in—you shall do that,' and she laughed. 'I can say "Atcha" and "Salaam do" and "Qui hi"! I must get a munshi at once, and begin Urdu and Gondi.'

'You want to start everything together, like all beginners.'

'Yes,' rising as she spoke. 'As I'm very sleepy, I'll begin by going to bed and going to sleep—those two things generally go together very well—and look here, dear old Phil, I'll only smoke one cigarette a day unless under extraordinary provocation—and that in private. Now,' smiling at him with her head on one side, 'am I not a pattern sister—an angel in the house? Good-night!'

As the most prominent woman in the station, Mrs. Heron (charged with curiosity and patronage) called upon Miss Trafford early the following afternoon. She wore her newest Europe gown, her most becoming hat, and her most engaging manners.

Milly, who was prepared to like everyone in Chandi, took to her on the spot. What glorious eyes and graceful gestures, what a rich low voice, and kindly welcome! She gladly accepted her visitor's offer to escort her to the Club, and make her known to the community.

Trafford inwardly fumed at his sister's eager acceptance; in his opinion Mrs. Heron was no fit associate for Milly—much less qualified to act as her social godmother, and present her before the tribunal of the station. It happened to be Thursday, the weekly holiday, when Miss Trafford appeared on the tennis ground, in the wake of her chaperon; a slim figure in white, wearing a distractingly becoming blue feathered hat, and carrying a blue sunshade with a crystal handle.

The young lady made an immense sensation—and was immediately fitted with a nickname by Mr. Chapman, who gallantly described her as 'The Star of India.' The two Miss Brights, who happened to be present, were in possession of blue hats and blue sunshades within a week—there is, however, a yawning Millinery gulf between the Rue de la Paix, Paris—and the Jubbulpore Bazaar.

The great Mrs. Heron herself had been unwillingly moved by the appearance of this brilliant young

woman, with a face perfect in outline, set in an aureole of crisp brown hair—and if Mrs. Heron was stirred, imagine the condition of the remainder of her little world ! All Chandi was figuratively prostrate before the new goddess. Chapman and Maguire were grovelling worshippers, and even the hole-picking, cynical Scruby—temporarily sobered by a recent lecture—was profoundly impressed. Poor fellow ! how little he suspected that he had just entered upon the most critical and interesting phase of his existence ! His keen eyes followed the newcomer, his sharp ears listened with satisfaction to a clear girlish voice proclaiming that she loved tennis and riding, dancing and bridge, and was determined to enjoy every hour of her life in beautiful little Chandi.

Trafford had lost no time in presenting his sister to Joan Hampton. He made the introduction with anxious *empressement*; here, in his opinion, was the ideal friend and companion for Milly. But it sometimes happens that, when a brother or husband earnestly desires to inaugurate a friendship between two ladies, the gracious wish has precisely the opposite effect ! And it must be regretfully confessed that on the present occasion Miss Trafford was not met half-way. Although Joan had been longing for her arrival, trusting to find in her a congenial companion—perhaps friend and confidante—now that Milly was actually present, her hopes froze, and imparted their icy temperature to her manner. The new-comer, putting her great beauty aside, looked so unexpectedly elegant and refined—so accustomed to the luxuries of life—what could she have in common with her ? There was as sharp a contrast between Miss Trafford's dainty cambric gown and French hat, and her own yellow and shrunken flannel skirt and sunburnt 'sailor,' as there was between this radiant, self-possessed, prosperous girl, and her shabby, washed-out, poverty-

stricken self ! Once upon a time, they would have met as equals ; now, she and this dazzling stranger could have nothing in common ; for the one were all the sweets of life—for the other, all the bitter, the Dead Sea fruit.

On one point Joan felt particularly sensitive : this was respecting her relations, Mr. Castellas and Lily. A distant hint, or a sneer at ‘ black blood,’ brought the colour to her thin cheeks. After Trafford had effected the introduction, and as she and Milly stood exchanging commonplaces, a bouncing young woman, with a round face and eyes to correspond, cannoned violently against her, and giggled out a breathless half-whispered request.

‘ Miss Trafford,’ said Joan, drawing herself up and meeting her eyes steadily, ‘ my sister Lily—wishes to make your acquaintance.’

‘ Your *sister* ! ’ repeated the other. Her glance, the intonation of sharp surprise, were but momentary. Milly’s well-trained manners had but for a second escaped from her control ; the second, however, was sufficient to wound the other English girl to the quick. She coloured painfully, and, leaving Lily to chatter to the newcomer (Lily—oh, so proud and pleased to be coupled with the centre of attraction), drew back, overhearing such scraps as—

‘ Oh yess, orl right, then to-morrow morning at eight o’clock—it will be so nice. I am awfullee fond of tennis, but I am sure you arre too good for me—oh yess—quite a dab. Now, if you would like a set with two gentlemen also—there is Captain Gresham—’

At this detested name, Joan’s impatience so completely overcame her as to carry her to the far side of the ground—away from earshot and eyesight.

For the next few days the sole topic in the station was Trafford’s wonderful sister ! Indeed her fame spread far and wide, and people from the district

actually invaded Chandi in order to have a look at the celebrated spin, of whom the little place was so ridiculously proud.

Christmas with its red berries, and cotton-wool decorations, had come and gone ; it was now the end of January, and within a month the stranger within the gates of Chandi had made herself as completely at home as if she had been an old resident. Her energy was astonishing. She penetrated into the Bazaar, accompanied by Mary Ayah, and there questioned, bargained, and admired. Some sights, however, administered a rather painful shock ; such as birds with their eyes sewn up, fowls hanging in bunches head downwards. Against these cruelties she protested with horrified gestures, and offers of money ; but was it likely that the customs of an ancient country were to be changed for the sake of a couple of rupees ? or to please the fancy of a beautiful young woman who had crossed the ' Kala Pani ' ? Let her look at her own land—where, by all accounts, strange things were done to live animals.

Milly took an active interest in the garden and the stable, made friends with the children in the compound, and daily accompanied her brother on his long rides into the great Bandi. She declared that she felt the East to her finger-tips—glowing, mysterious, beautiful India, and if any one desired to see a truly happy human being, they had but to look at Trafford's sister enjoying a morning gallop on the brown pony. Immediately after her arrival, the new-comer had been entertained by her neighbours first at a social tea at the Zoo ; where she had been introduced to the animals, and established a warm friendship with Barli the bear. Then Mrs. Heron, as the head of society, had given a ' Burra Khana ' in honour of Miss Trafford ; the occasion was sufficiently important to justify oysters and pomfret in ice (all the way from Bombay), the pro-

duction of the best glass and silver, and all the hostess's diamonds.

The guest of the evening dazzled the company in a Paris frock of painted chiffon, with sparkling wings in her hair, and subsequently played Chopin to an appreciative audience—that is to say, to Mrs. Baxter, Miss Hampton, and Mr. Scruby. The remainder of the company were aching and fuming to begin bridge.

Milly's next invitation was to a high tea with Mrs. Baxter. To this she went accompanied by Philip. After a substantial meal of cold roast fowl, hot cakes and coffee, the hostess produced and displayed her little treasures: the photograph of her bearded husband, her son, a missionary down South, her daughter, the wife of a teacher in Burmah. The Baxters were a missionary family, and all their hopes and thoughts were bounded by 'the field.' Milly, by her own request, was taken into the home to see the Orphanage girls. When conducted among them, she found that they were forty in number, of ages ranging from three to seventeen, dark in complexion, and somewhat stunted in figure, wearing the chignon, cloth, and glass bangles of their race. They eagerly exhibited their needlework to the visitor, and sang Bajums (or hymns) with real zest. To Milly, their shrill wild voices seemed to be the echo of many generations of ancestors, who had lived and died among the wild things of nature!

'I am so interested in the native people,' she declared, 'and no one seems to share my taste. I ask, and they say, "Oh, he is a Gond—Gonds are good chaps!" or, "She is a Santhali—you should see her dance!" and that seems to exhaust everything. Even Philip, who spends his life in the jungle, knows next to nothing about the lords of the soil, much as he likes them.'

'That is true,' he admitted, 'but what is there to know? A Gond is a true jungle man; he loves his

axe, and something to chop at. He is a fair shot with his bow and arrow, has a sixth sense with respect to woodcraft, turns out cheerfully to beat for game, is always ready for a laugh. He wears a marigold stuck behind his ears, is fond of Mohowa liquor, the flesh of bullocks, his family gods,—and there you have him !'

'Yes, in a sketchy way,' rejoined his sister, 'but I want to get nearer than that.'

'Nearer to a Gond—O Lord !'

'Yes, I know what you mean,' said Mrs. Baxter. 'Binia here, one of our big girls, will be delighted to talk about her people. She speaks and reads English, and has quite a cultivated taste, enjoys Kipling and Sir Walter Scott, and embroiders exquisitely. Now and then she has strange fits and is difficult to manage; refuses to work, refuses to speak, and just sits staring before her. At such times, I believe her heart is in the depths of the Sal forests.'

'The call of the blood ?' suggested Trafford.

'Perhaps—who knows? Come here, Binia !'

A short, thick-set, blunt-featured girl, with a grin upon her broad face, advanced bashfully.

'This lady would like to hear something about the forest folk—your folk. Can you tell her what you remember of your life before you were a Christian ?'

Binia rattled her glass bangles, rolled her eyes, and remained mute as a fish.

Milly gazed at her appealingly; few could meet her gaze unmoved.

'You worshipped many gods, did you not ?' she asked in her most persuasive voice, and the Gondi's tongue was loosened.

'Oh yes, Miss Sahib, the Chotah Deo and others.'

'Had they names ?'

'Oh yes,' and Binia rattled off, 'the Battle-Axe God, the God of Mischief, the Bell God, Pola the Animal God, and Chawar the Cow's Tail.'

'I see you remember them splendidly ! And where are your temples ?'

'We have no temples, Miss Sahib—only the gods' threshing-floor ; there are many in the woods. We women may not worship there. Also there are sacrifices.'

'To the gods ?'

'Oh yes ; always when people die—a bullock for a man, a heifer for a woman. They tie the animal by the horns, till the fore-feet are off the ground, and then chop off its head. After this the soul of the man goes to the place of the gods—and there is a thapna—a feast ; they make a little toy seat in the house and paint it red ; and the soul comes back when it pleases.'

'So the house is full of souls ?'

She nodded.

'Can you remember your parents ?' inquired Philip.

'Oh yes, Sahib ; my father was a woodcutter, and also he beat for game. When he had money, he bought Daru liquor, and sweetmeats, but one day a wounded tiger killed him. We were very poor, and my mother died. There was talk of giving me the Akra plant—which causes death—as I had no relations ; but Padré Baxter heard of me, and took me home nine years ago. I am now sixteen.'

'And what are the marriage ceremonies of your people, do you know ?' asked Milly.

'Oh yes,' brightening instantly. 'The man and girl call together the village, and then they go seven times round the Bhanwar, or sacred pole. After this, a live fowl is torn asunder, the blood sprinkled on their heads, then a pig is strangled and eaten—and that is all !'

'All ! I should hope so,' exclaimed Milly, with an expression of horrified disgust.

'Ah, Miss Sahib, you think the custom bad ; but among the Dhumars—they are water people—at a

wedding they kill and eat *crocodile*; yes, with much loud singing of wicked songs.'

Milly glanced interrogatively at Mrs. Baxter. Was this sleek-haired girl making fun of her?

'Binia is right; many customs seem strange to you, Miss Trafford. These children of the soil live in wattle huts on fruit and nuts and wild animals, and worship their weapons and ancestors—just as they did hundreds of years ago.'

'Are you a real Gond, Binia, or a Korku?' inquired Philip.

The girl threw her head back.

'I am a Raj Gond, your honour,' she answered, with pride, 'not a dust Gond.'

'Binia is clever with her needle, and makes quite a nice little sum of money,' said Mrs. Baxter. 'As soon as she has saved forty rupees, she is to be married.'

To Binia blushes were impossible; but she assumed an air of coy confusion, wriggled, giggled, and twisted her flexible toes with extraordinary energy.

'It is to Junnam, a village grazier, who was one of our own boys.'

'I should like to give her a small present—what do you suggest?' Milly asked in a low voice.

'A couple of rupees would be munificent,' Mrs. Baxter whispered back.

'I will send you ten rupees, Binia, as soon as I go home,' said Milly aloud. 'I want you to buy something for your house.'

'Ten rupees!' she repeated incredulously. '*Das Rupiya!*' and her face worked with emotion. 'Miss Sahib, it is a fortune! Now I can buy the little red heifer—oh!' and she broke into voluble speech in her own tongue, and many times repeated the word 'Mura' (a cow).

'There! you see you are a fairy princess!' exclaimed Mrs. Baxter, 'and I hope Binia and Junnam, may marry as soon as the Padré returns.'

'I hope they may,' echoed Philip, 'and live long, and die happy! Now, Milly, that you have gratified your curiosity, and promoted a match, I'm afraid I must carry you off, as I have some fellows coming to see me about an auction of timber.'

'Well, good-bye, Mrs. Baxter,' she said, taking her brother by the arm; 'come along, you old auctioneer humbug—going-going—*gone!*' and she flitted down the steps.

## CHAPTER XXIV

'IF ONLY—'

NATURALLY Mrs. Castellas was eager to play her part; entertain Miss Trafford, and, as she expressed it, 'do the thing in style'; and in consequence of this hospitable craving, for several days, discussion raged on the question of a dance.

'Nothing so easy!' declared the soul of extravagance. 'Borrow the Club dance cloth, and clear out my bedroom. Joan can play, refreshments come only to a few rupees, and there you are! The room has a stone floor, but it holds fifty; the sitting-out will be in the verandah. Mrs. Heron ~~will~~ lend chairs and Chinese lanterns. I'll have the Doctor's cook and ice machine, and get champagne from Bombay at that place we dealt at years ago. *They* don't know we are now so poor!'

After a long wrangle, during which Joan battled desperately with Lily and her mother, and the Doctor maintained a benevolent neutrality, the dance was whittled down to a mere tea, with Europe jam, biscuits, and savoury sandwiches. The company were limited to twelve.

Nevertheless the function, according to Lily, proved 'a howling success.' She wore a new gold belt (a present from the Captain), and had kept her

hair in curling pins for twenty-four hours with startling results. Mrs. Castellas received her guests attired in a faded old foulard (which had once known London) and wearing a necklace of large blue beads, and an extra coating of powder and rouge. Mr. Castellas and his step-daughter were discreetly unobtrusive in white linen. The Captain was, of course, present, well-groomed, debonair and jocular, playing the host, making himself agreeable to Miss Trafford, and asking her sundry clever questions—whilst Lily followed his movements with stormy eyes. Tea was accompanied by conversation—chiefly supported by Mrs. Castellas, who, cup in hand, feet on footstool, was alternately seductive, lachrymose, and reminiscent. When she had related several thrilling tales of India—as she knew it—and London ‘as it was in her time,’ she suddenly brought in and exalted the Hampton family!

‘Now, there’s my Joan, you see—her grand-mamma a French titled lady, and that proud she never spoke to a servant, and the place beyond telling for grandeur ; and there’s that girl,’ pointing with her teaspoon, ‘as was offered to be adopted, and would have had her own maid and her riding-horse, and give it all up and turned her back on everything, to come out to me. Now that’s what I call being a *daughter* !’

Poor Joan, her face was a study in misery and distress. Milly felt compassion for her, and vainly attempted to stem the tide of Mrs. Castellas’ history of the Hampton family ; her effort was swept aside with a gesture of good-natured impatience, and the speaker proceeded—

‘ My Joan is not one to be overlooked, though she is so small and backward about herself. No one in India has better blood in her veins—not the Viceroy himself.’

By this time the topic had effected her escape through one of the long glass doors, which opened

upon a singularly bare verandah—there were no dirzees on their mats, no caged birds, no plants, no chairs. Here she leant against the wall with her fingers in her ears. Here Trafford—a late arrival—discovered her.

‘ Oh ! ’ she exclaimed, hoping he had not noticed her attitude, ‘ how late you are ! ’ but there was no note of reproach in her voice.

‘ What is it ? ’ he inquired. ‘ *Singing?* ’

‘ No,’ she answered with a little flicker of a smile ; ‘ it is a party for your sister, and my mother is telling every one about my family and grand relations ; it is really too preposterous. I was obliged to run away—such talk, considering our circumstances and position, is ridiculous. It makes me writhe with shame.’

‘ But if the talk is true ? ’

‘ After all, *does* it matter that my great-grandfather and his family, French aristocrats, were victims of the Terror ? or that my father’s people have lived on their own lands since the reign of Richard the Third ? It is not a question of then—it is *now*—not what we were, but what we are. We live in a tumble-down old Indian bungalow, and are very poor people—no one guesses how miserably poor.’

Trafford not merely guessed at, but was intimately acquainted with *all* the details of the family finances. He was also conscious of the insidious allurements of opportunity—they had the verandah entirely to themselves, with the exception of a few green lizards.

‘ Then I shall stay here, and keep you company,’ he boldly announced, ‘ and perhaps you will talk to *me*. We will be the overflow of the meeting ! Tell me, Miss Hampton, why do you always avoid me ? Are you afraid of me ? ’

‘ I—oh no.’ She looked at him for a moment without speaking. ‘ Why should I be afraid of you ? ’ she asked with careful self-control.

‘ That’s just what I want to know ! With half an eye any one can see that you are. If I come to you when you are sitting, you rise at once and walk away ; if I join in a group, you move on. . Why will you not be friends with me ? ’

‘ But I am, of course ! ’ she answered nervously.

‘ Yes—a mere figure of speech.’

‘ No, no indeed,’ she protested, steadily watching as she spoke a string of black ants who were crossing the chunan floor, ‘ only you don’t understand.’

‘ I must confess that I do not understand why one day you seem approachable—and the next you are the North Pole itself.’

‘ And is that your impression of me ? ’

‘ Yes,’ he replied after a moment’s hesitation.

‘ Mr. Trafford, I have—not—a very—easy life,’ she looked at him with misty eyes, and her beautiful lips trembled. ‘ Would you—who have been so awfully good to me—who wish to be my friend—make it intolerable ? ’ and she spread out her hands with a gesture of helplessness.

‘ No ; on the contrary, I would take you out of it altogether—and try and make you happy.’

‘ That you could never do—neither one, nor the other,’ she answered with a touch of passion. ‘ I know that you are sorry for me—but please do not—do not—not—’

‘ Love you,’ he suggested in a husky voice. ‘ I swear I can’t help it.’

As he spoke the colour receded from her face, and left her very white. After a pause she spoke.

‘ But think of your position in the world,’ she urged passionately ; ‘ think of our—two mothers—compare them ! My place is here with mine. If only—if only—’

There was a change in her expression, brief and vivid as if seen by lightning, yet it gave him hope. He stood beside her silent for a moment, waiting for words to come. At this, the most critical instant,

Lily the moon-faced stepped into the verandah, with her mouth full of chocolates. As her rolling eyes caught sight of her sister—who seemed curiously agitated—she cried—

‘ Joan, my goody me ! Whatt are you doing here —you and Traff ? You look as if you had been quarrelling ! Joan, do come in at once and get the new cards. Mamma is going to tell Miss Trafford’s fortune,’ and Joan (her fortune untold) was imperiously herded indoors, leaving Trafford standing alone in the verandah, looking vacantly in front of him.

The tea-table had now been cleared, and Mrs. Castellas, in possession of the new cards, proceeded to tell Milly’s fortune with much pomp and circumstance. She was lavish of incidents, details, and advice ; to which all listened with the most flattering attention—all, except Miss Trafford’s brother, who never appeared. There was the inevitable dark man, a good deal of unpleasantness with a Knave of Hearts, and a wicked Queen of Clubs ; then the Ace of Spades came out—the death card—fortunately upside down.

‘ Miss Trafford, there is a rich man over the seas who adores you,’ said Mrs. Castellas, looking at her solemnly. ‘ It would never surprise *me* if you married him yet ! ’

Milly smiled and nodded, and said she supposed so, since it seemed to be her fate ! And then, her future assured, Mrs. Castellas proceeded to tell the fortunes of Mr. Scruby—who would die a cranky old bachelor, having no heart—and Captain Gresham, whose career was described at flattering length, with many encouraging promises ; he would marry a dark girl with lots of money and become celebrated. As the fortune-telling came to an end, a penetrating odour of kerosene oil indicated the approach of lamps and darkness, and the guests with one accord took a cheerful and simultaneous departure.

Trafford and his sister presently began to return

these local civilities, and gave one or two delightful little dinners, followed by music and games. It was evident that Milly was an experienced hostess ; there were not only dainty dishes, but ménú cards, shaded candles, flowers, and even salted almonds—her own particular weakness. Her dainty dinners were far more ‘up-to-date’ than those given by Mrs. Heron, with heavy old-fashioned entrées, and long and gloomy waits between the courses ; but then Mrs. Heron did not summon the cook to a conference in the verandah, and spend an hour puzzling over a receipt book, a Hindustani dictionary, and a little oil stove—experimenting and concocting savouries and entrées with her own fair hands.

After one of these *recherché* repasts, Trafford and his sister sat in the verandah congratulating one another on its success, and discussing (and why not?) their departing guests, Scruby, Gresham, and the Herons.

‘You and Mrs. Heron seem to be tremendous pals,’ said Trafford, stretching himself in a long chair ; the recollection of a fond parting embrace was disturbing to his mind. It was evident that Mrs. Heron was getting a tremendous hold on Milly, and sending her ‘chits’ two or three times a day.

‘Oh yes, I do like her ! She says I must call her by her Christian name, “Ella.” She really is a most fascinating woman, and so interesting to talk to, and has told me *all* the station secrets,’ and Milly nodded her head expressively.

‘I dare say ! but none of her own ? ’

‘Grumpy Phil, *you* don’t like her, eh ? ’

‘It seems to me that Miss Hampton would be a more suitable confidante. A girl of your own age, too.’

‘Oh yes, I know you like Joan Hampton and she likes you, but she will have nothing to say to *me* ! I can’t get any forrader—like the farmer with the claret ; and as to that awful Castle that smells of

earth, and the funny old mother with her cards and her rouge, and the poor dear limp man, propping himself against a wall. Every time he looks at me he says "Extraordinary!" It's all rather different to the Herons.'

'No doubt of that,' with an impatient shrug; 'the Herons are rich people.'

'Philip, did you notice Mrs. Heron's wrap tonight? It was chilly, and she wore it on purpose to show me—all tiny leopard skins, trimmed with black bear, lined with orange satin, made up in Paris, and simply glorious!'

'Yes, thank you, I know that coat well—we all do—those tiny baby leopards were rather expensive. You can imagine that a panther makes trouble if her cubs are carried off. Mrs. Heron expressed a wish for those skins—with poor Curtis to hear was to obey, but he was horribly mauled—blood-poisoning set in, and that cloak all but made a funeral pall. He went home sick, and the lady no doubt has forgotten his very name—but she wears what nearly cost him his life.'

'Phil, how bitter you can be! Well, now, listen to *me* being bitter. I cannot endure the great Ivor Gresham. If we are the Babes in the Wood—he is the Wicked Uncle.'

'I am not very much set on him myself, but Gresham is a gentlemanly man, and knows his way through the world.'

'You don't think that he is what is called a wrong 'un? and that he is strutting about in sheep's clothing?'

'Whoever saw a sheep strut! He is all right, and in his own skin. He came here rather at a loose end, and made himself popular, and the Deputy Commissioner got him the Jambore billet. Of course he made inquiries and wrote to Gresham's reference, who replied that he had not heard of Gresham for some time, and was only too delighted to be respon-

sible—and hoped he would be able to stand India, and like his post—so there you are ! ’

‘ And here he is !

Trafford always kept a close mouth respecting his profession, and if he had any suspicions connected with skins and timber, these were not to be shared with Milly, and ultimately with *Mrs. Heron*.

‘ I say, look here, Milly,’ he began after a lengthy silence. ‘ Of course we all know that you are—a—er—most attractive young person, and can scarcely help singeing our poor moths. I make you a present of Maguire, Chapman, the Two Brights, and Donald Fraser—but as you are strong be merciful—and spare Scruby ! He was extraordinarily good to me when I came out ; I therefore desire that he is *not* to advance beyond the liking stage. He would, in a jiffy, if you raised your little finger. I’m not sure that he is not in love with you now—but kindly make yourself *disagreeable*, and bear in mind that he is engaged to a girl at home—engaged since they were kids—and leave the Gosling severely alone.’

‘ Leave him alone ! ’ and she burst into a delighted laugh. ‘ You talk as if I were a fox that would toss him over my shoulder, carry him into the forest, and there devour him. He is a very good sort. I like him, I love his dogs, and I simply adore his bear—a real lady ! ’

‘ Ah then, you haven’t seen old Barli making a beast of herself with Mohowa fruit, and grunting and gurgling and guttling. However, I implore you to restrain your fascinations ; or some fine day we shall have Gosling arriving with all the animals on a string, and offering them for your acceptance along with their keeper.’

‘ But I do like Mr. Scruby—yes, far better than any of the men in Chandi,’ and throwing up her eyes, ‘ Alas ! such is fate ! I am forbidden to attract him. I am to make myself disagreeable. I think, Phil,’ and she glanced at him mischievously, ‘ it is

rather foolish of you to interfere—it is just the surest and most romantic way of making me fall in love with the inaccessible.'

Trafford had been admitted into the secret of Scruby's joke, in which, for his part, he saw no grain of humour. The news had been whispered to him by Mrs. Heron (doth not a whisperer separate chief friends?); and Trafford was secretly furious with his pal. That he should have dared to dress up and personate his sister! For a day or two his mind was afire. Now here was the fortunate psychological moment to turn Milly's partiality for the Gosling into a nice temperate dislike.

'What do you suppose Scruby had the cheek to do?' he asked as he gazed at his sister, who was nursing Henry and smiling at her own thoughts.

'Oh, anything—from the look of him!'

'Do you know that before we arrived, he dressed himself up and pretended to be *you*!'

'To be *me*!' opening her eyes to their widest extent.

'Yes—was got up quite smartly, poured out tea here, in this very drawing-room, and made a most awful fool of Maguire! He was amazingly successful and fascinating. He played the part so admirably (he is our Actor Manager and Playwright, you know) that I hear the great Jabberwock offered him the loan of his best pony, and actually kissed his hand! Naturally, he is furious with Scruby, who nearly got the chuck-out, and I must confess I was pretty mad too, and I gave Scruby—though he is my pal—a pretty good piece of my mind!'

'Oh, Phil, how truly delicious! The other Miss Trafford! What a splendid idea! taking, so to speak, the wind out of my sails, and enjoying the *éclat* of impersonating the new spin! I'd give my best hat to have been peeping behind the purdah. What a simply killing joke! You've made me fonder than ever of Mr. Scruby! I can just see

the majestic lady-killer mouthing behind his great moustache, and that impudent Gosling simpering and giggling, and pretending to be *me*. Oh, how too funny ! ' and she threw herself back in her chair and laughed immoderately, to the intense surprise of her brother and Henry, though the new little Green Parrot (wide awake long past his bed hour) immediately joined his mistress in a series of ear-splitting shrieks.

' Oh, *you* laugh at everything ! ' protested Philip reproachfully.

' Yes,' rising and wiping her eyes with a morsel of lace, ' is it not better to laugh than to cry ? I think Solomon the Wise says that. I laugh because I am so truly happy out here. At home,' and her face grew serious, ' between ourselves, and only to you do I confess, I did a good deal of crying, in my little room under the slates.'

Philip looked gravely at her. Yes, he understood ; and there was a world of unspoken sympathy in his handsome dark eyes as he laid his hand upon his sister's shoulder, and bent down and kissed her.

## CHAPTER XXV

### FIRST BLOOD

THE third week in February was the date of the annual Chandi function. Active preparations were going forward—that is to say, a constant practising of tennis, croquet, and shooting ; tents arose mushroom-like in every compound, the one board floor in the Club had been polished for dancing, a scratch band collected, and the station awaited its guests. Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy had accepted an invitation to spend the week with the Traffords, and great indeed had been the exertions of the new Miss

Sahib to fitly receive them: Suddenly a bomb of news fell into the Bazaar, and exploded in the station. The Rajah of Jambore—long reported to be ailing—was defunct. Yes, the funeral ceremonies were already begun. His heir, a puny boy of four, succeeded to the Guddee; the British Raj now took up the reins, prepared to elect a Regency, and nurse the shattered estates through a long minority.

And Captain Ivor Gresham's occupation was gone!

The deposed official—minus his usual sleek confidence—came into the station, white, excitable, irritable—consumed a number of pegs, talked mysteriously of ‘native poisons,’ and quartered himself upon the Castellas, to the unaffected joy of one sister, and the profound disgust of the other.

The sports were postponed. A few tennis matches and a feast to the Mission girls were all that marked the great annual function. Mrs. Kennedy, who was indifferent alike to sports and dancing, had been anxious to see her dear Traffords in their own little home, but an unexpected descent of visitors held her and her husband fast at Karwassa.

A fortnight elapsed—three weeks. The hot weather was approaching; punkahs were commencing their weary flap. A fierce March sun had climbed into the hard blue sky, and the trees were bare; their scorched leaves whirled and eddied about the dusty roads, and below Chandi the empty plains lay quivering in the heat haze.

As if in sympathy with the pervading temperature, Jambore (since matters had been investigated) had become somewhat too sultry, as a place of residence, for Mr. Gresham. There were rumours that a scandalous amount of debt, waste, and expenditure (unaccounted for) had been disclosed; also that the Deputy Commissioner had written certain strong letters to the Secretary of the late Rajah. But Ivor Gresham—besides being cynical and impudent—was clever, plausible, a past master in word-

fencing and excuse—and nothing tangible had been brought home to him. He had, however, sold two ponies, and moved his belongings into an empty room at the Castle, where he established himself as the fiancé of Lily, and a paying (?) guest.

The Indian cold weather was a delight of the past, Collectors and Commissioners had struck their camps, lucky people had soared to the hills, the homeward ships were crammed, and the few passengers outward bound were the reluctant folk whose leave had expired, or the keen sporting fraternity, craving for the parched up jungles and big game. Among the latter was Colonel the Honourable Julian Tristram, late a Guardsman ; a tall, tanned man of forty-five, with grizzled black hair, and keen blue eyes. He had abandoned the sword for the rifle, in order to enjoy unlimited sport, and Asia, Africa, and America had been visited in turn.

Colonel Tristram was not a Society man,—the wild places of the earth had infinitely more attraction for him than the flagstones of Piccadilly. This was his second visit to Chandi, and he put up, as previously, at the Dâk Bungalow, with his servants, stores, guns, and, on this occasion, guest, a certain Mr. Dudley Dene, a dark young fellow with crinkly hair, indifferent manners, and large fortune. His regiment—the Scorchers—was quartered at Secunderabad : he had obtained six weeks' shooting leave, and professed to be extremely keen and anxious to see some sport. On a previous trip Colonel Tristram had gone forth alone, with an occasional visit from Gresham—who, as usual, had undertaken to do the honours of the station ; subsequently a slight coolness had arisen between them. This was connected with the mysterious disappearance of a pair of bison horns and two magnificent tiger skins.

Tristram made no accusations ; but he allowed it to be known, that he did think a fellow-countryman

would have given him some practical assistance in hunting down the thief—especially a man who lived in Chandi, spoke Gondi, and was personally acquainted with every local shikari.

On the present occasion, he brought a special letter of introduction to Trafford, upon whom he called, and was informed that 'the Sahib was out'; he, however, caught sight of a white dress and a pair of pretty bronze shoes on a long chair in the verandah. Undoubtedly the Mem Sahib at her ease, devouring a new novel! Later on, at the Club, where he met the entire community, he was astonished to see a pretty, smart-looking girl playing tennis. There was nothing of the Anglo-Indian Moffusilite about her. On the contrary, he was informed that she was '*the Miss Trafford*', and his informant appeared to consider that this said all! What could have brought a young woman of her stamp to the Jungle? Could it be possible that her object, like his, was shikar?

Presently he made her brother's acquaintance, noted the family good looks, and studied the resemblance between the pair, as he discussed beats, and the new bullet. He declined invitations to dinner at the Club, or even with Mrs. Heron, who now came up, greeted him with effusion, and upbraided him playfully for his laziness. She talked volubly of his last visit, saying, 'Do you remember this? do you remember that?' accompanying each question with an expressive glance from her matchless eyes. Her memories became so extensive and so personal, that Trafford felt himself to be uncomfortably *de trop*, and presently walked away.

Miss Trafford and Mr. Dene soon became acquainted. He admired her—as who did not?—and declared that there was not a girl in Secunderabad (the largest military station in India) to touch her! He imparted to her that he was mad keen on this shoot—Tristram was a sort of connection,

and he was in rare luck—it was all to be done first class—a Madras cook, and runner for ice and letters. He hoped to bring back a bag that would make some of his brother officers open their eyes. *They* said he was only good for bridge, and dancing.

‘And are you?’ she asked innocently.

‘Well, my modesty forbids me to brag—but I’m pretty hard to beat at either! I only wish I could have a couple of waltzes with *you*!’

‘What—this weather!’ she laughed; ‘I think it would be the dance of death!’

As Colonel Tristram smoked an after-dinner cigar, and meditated on his arrangements, his mind turned to Trafford, and some useful hints that had fallen from him. Yes, now he saw it all—he was the son of a certain Mrs. Vernon Trafford in Queen Street, and the girl!—by Jove! yes—he had heard of her last season, a beauty and *difficile*, who had run off abroad to her brother, and here she was, like a golden pheasant among a crowd of shabby sparrows. His thoughts dwelt on Miss Trafford, with a persistency that amazed him. Do as he would they ever returned to a certain brilliant face and radiant smile.

‘I see amazing changes every time I come out,’ remarked Tristram, as he and Trafford walked together from the Club.

‘Yes, I daresay you do.’

‘The country, after lying asleep for ages, seems to be stirring at last—motors all over the place. Why, they even have a motor service up to Pachmari, and railways, narrow and broad gauge, in every direction!’

‘It’s these manganese mines that have stirred up the C.P.,’ explained Trafford; ‘there seems to be any quantity of the stuff in the country. You see we have our little tinpot line, but no use for motors—our roads are too bad, bar the Trunk Road, and the country too jungly.’

‘The Indian roads are magnificent,’ said Tristram;

'next to no traffic, a Paradise for the scorcher, scooting along in the cool moonlight. A fellow was telling me that these motors here have put on the pace in more ways than one ; for instance, a police officer, instead of riding, now gets round his district unannounced in no time, and does his one hundred and fifty a day—same with railways and engineering work—the boss turns up *most* unexpectedly, and things have got to hum !' Another more disagreeable change is the immense rise in prices, treble what it used to be ten years ago. We have to thank the hordes of tourists for this. I remember a bearer being well content with twenty-five rupees a month, to take you on from Bombay—now a man asks a hundred without winking !'

'Well, we are out of the track here,' said Trafford, 'and servants' wages are much what they were, I believe. I'm not long out myself, you know ; but if your bearer tells mine he's got such pay, the whole bazaar will be in an uproar.'

Before they parted, Trafford invited Tristram and Dene to breakfast the next morning, as they were off to the jungle at sundown ; and Dene, as he halted at the gateway, informed Miss Trafford that he was simply counting the hours and the moments till they began !

The fortunate enthusiast was not obliged to wait so long. He 'began,' as he expressed it, early the next morning, sallying forth casually with his rifle and a couple of coolies—to beat nowhere in particular, and anywhere in general, around Chandi—this proud and lucky man had the good fortune to find among the crops half a mile from the station, a splendid black bear ! As it merely stood and stared at him, made no attempt to charge or bolt, he bowled it over with ludicrous ease ! At the first shot, the creature set up a terrible howling and crying, so he fired again and broke its back. It took four shots to silence it. 'I had no idea bears were so beastly

hard to kill,' he announced, as he subsequently related his triumph during breakfast in the Traffords' verandah, 'but I tell you I've bagged a splendid skin—the place must be swarming with game. Anyhow, I've got first blood, eh, Tristram?'

The young sportsman was nearly beside himself with exultation and excitement. Chapman and Maguire were fellow-guests, enjoying the iced mango fool, and fragrant Indian tea, when borne by two coolies and tied to a stout pole, Mr. Dene's boasted trophy was laid at the foot of the steps.

Then one and all rose, and crowded down to gaze.

'Bedad, a foine bear!' remarked Maguire judicially.

'Yes—see, there's where I broke her paw!' explained Dene; 'that was my first shot—and there—'

'Why!' interrupted a clear, shrill voice. 'Oh, Philip, it's poor Barli! Look at the scratches on her face. There's her collar mark too. You know she is allowed loose at night, and is so used to people, she would not run away.'

Alas, alas! it was undoubtedly poor Barli!

'I—I don't know how Scruby will take this!' mumbled Maguire, twisting his moustache furiously.

'Yes, I'd rather it was you than me,' supplemented Chapman, with a nod. 'You've shot his pet bear.'

'Oh, nonsense!' exclaimed the triumphant sportsman. 'Fancy any one keeping a pet bear! They deserve to have it shot. I hope when I kill my first tiger, I'll not be slaying some one's tame animal. Well, I must say the old lady is in first-class condition—and I shall ask Scruby to let me have the skin.'

'Poor old Barli!' said Milly, picking up her gown and descending the steps to examine the dead favourite, 'you were such a dear friendly person always—and I am so sorry for you.' Then raising her eyes, she looked straight at Dene, who was standing on the steps, hands in pockets, literally

swelling with importance, ‘ Mr. Dene, if Mr. Scruby gives you the skin of Barli—as long as I live—I shall never speak to him again ! ’

‘ Oh come, I say, Miss Trafford ! ’ he expostulated, ‘ what an awful fuss about an old dead bear ! ’

But Miss Trafford had swiftly disappeared indoors, leaving with the company the uncomfortable conviction that their hostess was crying.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### CAMP AND GROVE

AT the end of a fortnight, Colonel Tristram and his companion (leaving their camp *en route* to another jungle) returned to Chandi—in search of ammunition, and that equally indispensable item, soda water. The great shikari would have scoffed at the suggestion, but he had a secret and uneasy misgiving that he was drawn to the station not by the exigencies of housekeeping, but by the personal magnetism of Miss Trafford ! How often had her lovely face and sunny smile flashed into his sober thoughts when these should have been engrossed with tiger skins and sport !

‘ Can it be possible that I ’m *hit* at last ? ’ the renowned hunter inquired of an anxious bearded visage that confronted him in his little looking-glass. Why not ? This girl possessed two distinct characters ; the grace and ‘ society ’ manners essential to a future Countess of Pulborough, and the sincere unaffected delight in novel scenes, and the simple life so indispensable to himself !

He had only seen the young lady on three occasions ; however, absence quickens the imagination, and ‘ far-off hills are green.’ But in justice to Milly Trafford—let it be understood that she never dis-

appointed, but transcended expectation ; and when Colonel Tristram beheld her again, he was figuratively a lost man ! The preliminary shoot proved successful, the mighty hunter had shot two tigers, three samburs, and a bison—a most noble head. Mr. Dene's bag, on the contrary, was pitifully lean ; merely a barking deer, three pea-fowls, and a herdsman's cow. He, however, had wounded a large number of unfortunate animals—thus left to linger and perish miserably in the jungle.

The hot weather, which was now well advanced, brought with it a critical question for Trafford. He had arranged to visit a distant district where manganese mines were intruding on his trees, and shoot with Tristram,—sharing expenses of camp and beaters—thereby combining business with pleasure ; but meanwhile—what was to become of Milly ? A friend of their mother's had, at that lady's instigation, bidden her to Simla, and promised to give her 'a good time,' but this proposal Milly, so to speak, put from her with both hands. Yet she could not be left alone in the station—much less accept a warm invitation to the Herony ; indeed, Mrs. Heron's influence was already too dangerously evident (to tell the truth, she took a secret and malicious pleasure in exercising her fascinations on the enthusiastic sister of the hateful Traffy). Mrs. Baxter, that good Samaritan, happened to be out of the district nursing the wife of a brother missionary. Naturally, Mrs. Castellas would have received Miss Trafford with widely outstretched arms, but the 'Castle' was as much out of bounds as the Herony. What was to be done ?

It soon appeared that Trafford's masterful sister had already decided upon her fate. She had made up her mind to accompany her brother into the jungle, and announced the fact with calm self-confidence.

' You don't know what you are talking about ! '

he protested impatiently. ‘ You have no idea of the heat in a tent—you never could stand it.’

‘ Oh, I shan’t mind the heat,’ was the reckless reply of one who had never experienced a hot weather: ‘ the only question is, can I stand Mr. Dene ? ’

‘ You are always death on that fellow ! ’

‘ He was death on poor Barli. His perpetual I—I—my—my—get on my nerves, and give me a pain in my temper. However, I ’ll do my best to play the listener, and not succumb to an impulse to throw things at him.’

‘ He is a sort of cousin of Tristram’s ; he says he has had a wretched bringing up, screwed down for years into a back seat, and then suddenly launched into dazzling wealth, and absolute independence.’

‘ Just like a jack-in-the-box ! ’ remarked Milly flippantly, ‘ peculiar, unexpected, and jerky ! I am positive he is more than half-foreign—look at his eyes, his laziness, his gorgeous smoking-coats, and yellow silk socks—yes, and his hands—they are so weak, and small and helpless.’

‘ Never mind Dene. I ’m thinking of *you*, Milly. You haven’t the least idea of the burning heat and blinding glare in April in the jungle. It ’s very ugly too, all dried up, scarcely any water or vegetation, just baking sun and blasting winds and dust. Even in a double tent—you ’d find it pretty bad, I can promise you.’

‘ Oh yes, you are trying to choke me off, Phil,’ she answered with a laugh, ‘ the same as when you wanted to go fishing alone as a small boy, and told me the *crocodiles* would eat me ! But no, it ’s not to be done—I enjoy heat—I shall adore a tent ! ’

Her brother made a gesture of despair—he knew Milly of old. After a reflective silence, he said, ‘ You must have a woman with you.’ His tone implied victory.

'Mary Ayah, of course,' was the ready reply. 'She speaks five languages,' now counting on her fingers, 'Tamil, Gondi, Urdu, Canarese, and English.'

'English! You call her jabber English?'

'She has often been in camp,' ignoring the question, 'her last mistress was the wife of a collector.'

(Mary was really an excellent person; honest, quick-witted, capable, and nimble, educated at Kampti Convent, she was yet a woman of the world, who had been to Simla and Calcutta, and even to London—travelling, as she expressed it, 'by the Biscay River—plenty jumping that river.' Had walked in busy streets, penetrated into amazing shops, learnt to eat 'muttony chop,' and drink beer, and been feted in a servants' hall, where she told funny stories, cracked her finger-joints with astonishing effect, and sung improper Tamil songs to an innocent and appreciative audience.)

In the end—it is scarcely necessary to state—Milly prevailed. She promised and vowed in the most solemn manner to give no trouble; to be so entirely self-effacing that the other people in camp would scarcely be aware of her existence. She did not care two straws for the shooting, all she asked was to see the Indian jungle, and the quaint forest people.

The delicate task of announcing his sister's determination to Colonel Tristram was but little to Trafford's taste. He felt her guilty confederate, when he imparted the intelligence to that weather-beaten sportsman—as together they walked through the station from the Club.

'You see, my sister came out to be with *me*,' he explained rather lamely. 'She is crazy to see the jungle and something of camp life, and very keen about Natural History and Ethnology, and does not wish to go up to Simla; I can't well leave her in Chandi alone, and so perhaps it would be better if we made two parties? There's lots of sport for

all—especially since I've taken the horn hunters in hand.'

Colonel Tristram, who with difficulty dissembled his immense satisfaction, politely replied—

'Why, my dear fellow, of course you must bring your sister!'

'She will have her own jobs and employment—work and books and a munshi, and won't want to come out on the beats. It's the life—not the death—in the forest that appeals to her.'

'Oh yes, naturally. I can assure you we shall be delighted to have Miss Trafford in camp—and greatly honoured by her company.' And honoured they were.

The second shooting trip—which included Scruby—left Chandi by starlight, and travelled on the branch line a distance of forty miles. Here, at a flag-signal, the party were, so to speak, shot out into the very heart of a forest, where their own particular shikaris awaited them. As soon as the ponies had been detrained, the baggage transferred to bullock carts, the little company struck into the jungle, guided by Jadoo—a well-known Gond. This short dark thick-set man of cast-iron constitution and the eye of a hawk, the ear of a hare—led the way along a wood-cutters' track, with quick thudding footsteps, through the deep powdery dust. The road lay amid a truly arid prospect; early in April, the forests are bare, the great trees stripped of their leaves—which form a crackling carpet on the ground around them—immense festooning creepers, born of the rains, now seared and dead, hung entangled in branches, like frayed, forgotten ropes. The air was hot as from a furnace, and heavy with a strong sweet scent from the leafless mohowa,—whose yellow fruit-like flowers gave the sole dash of colour to a pervading grey monotony.

As Milly surveyed the deep blue sky, against which

the spectral limbs of naked trees gleamed white and bare, and saw the monotonous drab track, the rocks, and dry watercourses quivering in the Indian sun, she said to herself—

‘ Oh, how barren, and what a blinding glare ! This is not the least like what I expected ! ’

As they reached the summit of a hilltop, she exclaimed aloud, ‘ Oh, look—look—a jungle fire ! ’ for the expanse below was indistinct with a shimmering haze, due to the dust and intense heat, bluish in colour and exactly resembling the aftermath of a fierce conflagration, when the smoke has cleared away.

‘ It is not a fire, my innocent stranger,’ explained Trafford, ‘ it is only a blaze of flowers.’

Out of the haze, gradually appeared vast patches of vivid flame colour ; these, however, were merely the scarlet blossoms of the Patas—which, like most of the jungle trees in India, produce their glorious blooms in lavish abundance in the hot season.

(Such a sight, no doubt, met the gaze of Clive and his gallant little army in June 1757, when they fell upon the undisciplined hordes that followed Suraj-oo-dowlah ; for the plain on which the battle was fought was covered with Patas trees in full bloom, and the historic name of Plassy is believed to have been derived from them.)

Through this silent, scorching scene, as the orange sunset spread over the leafless woods, Colonel Tristram’s party slowly approached their first camp. It had been pitched in the vicinity of a village, under the branches of several great tamarind trees, and within easy reach of a well, with its water-raising apparatus, and leather ‘ mot,’ or bucket. Here they dispersed to their several quarters, to bathe and rest—subsequently to assemble in the large ochre-lined tent, with its awning, cucus tatties, and punkah. Later, the men held conference with the village malgoozar, matured their plans,

engaged beaters, and bespoke 'tie-ups.' The tiger shooting, as is customary in the Central Provinces, was to be from machans (platforms in trees not less than twenty feet from the ground), and fixed in a locality where the gorged and indignant beast, disturbed by tom-toms and fireworks, is likely to break cover.

It appeared that tigers were by no means scarce, the district was terrorized by a well-known man-eater, and the villagers, instead of offering sacrifices to 'Burra Deo' and 'Nuthia Deo' (the divine watchmen who guarded their borders), were only too eager to bring 'khubber' to sahibs who had come in quest of big shooting, and were prepared to rid them of their destroyer: who was known by the name of the 'Mordongri,' or 'Peacock Hill' devil. The villagers said that along a certain road in the heart of the Bandi, used by carters conveying wood and grain to distant depôts (these cart-men travel together in a leisurely string of from twenty to forty vehicles), it was a true and painful fact, that on various occasions one of the men had been dragged from his seat and carried off by this tiger; invariably in the same district—not always or ever in the same place. There was a sudden rush, a wild yell, and the victim, who was generally snatched from the middle of the line, was gone! And who dared to follow the tiger—and attempt a rescue? The wretched man's piercing screams rang in the ears of his trembling companions, as they struggled to control their stampeding cattle.

Many attempts—always futile—had been made upon this tiger's life by matchlocks, hatchets, bows and arrows, and even poison; but the monster—save for the loss of an ear—still roamed the forest unscathed; he travelled in a wide sanguinary circle, and it was said that his victims numbered at least a hundred of the population. The four sahibs hearkened to the tale (as translated by Jadoo) with

intense interest and indignation, and Colonel Tristram immediately offered three hundred rupees reward for reliable and positive 'khubber' respecting this scourge.

An excellent dinner left the sportsmen in high good humour, and to a late hour they discussed tigers, their uncertain habits, the extraordinary rapidity with which they travelled, interspersed with one or two thrilling personal narratives. They were so entirely absorbed in their subject, that—as on these occasions sometimes happens—they forgot the presence of the outsider and lady. Milly, who sat listening with Henry in her lap, decided that Dene was a braggart, her brother modest, and his friend the Gosling truthful—even to his own hurt!

For a long time she watched the servants in the mango tope, squatting and gesticulating around their cooking fires. She gazed at the sharply cut pattern of the surviving leaves of a pipal tree, that moonlight had cast at her feet, and then at the far-away stars overhead; at last, humbly recognizing her own insignificance, and carrying the fox-terrier in her arms, she unobtrusively retired to bed. Her first experience of camp life proved unexpectedly luxurious! and if Mary *did* kill a snake under the tent's outside flap—what then? She had a dear little white cot, a cane lounge with soft pillows, a writing-table, a dressing-table, lots of hooks for her frocks, a Europe bath—what more could she possibly desire? At daybreak, Milly was aroused by the twittering of bulbuls, the crowing of village cocks, the notes of birds; there was chotah hazree by candle-light, and a very early start. She stood unseen at the door of her tent, and saw the figures on ponies gradually disappear in a sort of blur, watched the low heat haze, and a blood-red sun rise through a misty vista of leafless trees; very gradually there came a sudden flood of lurid yellow light, that grew and spread over the dim landscape. Herds of

lean melancholy cattle were being driven forth to graze on withered white grass and grey dust, and oh, how Milly wished she could feed them all with bundles of juicy green lucerne ! Birds were flying about, gay parrots, blue jays, a pair of koopos were quarrelling just outside the tent ; the well wheel was ceaselessly in motion—it was time to be dressed and abroad.

The first beat proved successful ; the bag, when exposed under the tamarinds, proved to be a splendid sambur, a spotted deer, two peacocks for the pot, and that jungle pest, a wild dog.

During the day Milly had been disagreeably astonished at the temperature—but she was far too proud even to mention the fact, and permit Phil, brother-like, to exclaim, ‘ I told you so ! ’ She lay for hours gasping on a couch in a loose dressing-gown, endeavouring to read and work, till the monotonous creaking of the well wheel lulled her to sleep. In the cool of the evening she strolled about the camp with Henry, and received a deputation of village children—little brown people who had ventured to come and gaze at the first Miss Sahib their eyes had ever beheld ! Among these, she distributed smiles and largesse in the shape of coins, and oh, revelation —chocolate ! and dispatched them to their homes big with news and importance.

When, after dinner, the sportsmen sat outside the tent a little tired, and more or less complacent, she sang, by request, to her mandoline—occasionally accompanied by Henry in low sweet howls. She sang with intensity of feeling, and yet in so simple and natural a fashion, so like a sweet-throated bird, that one scarcely dared to applaud.

The servants and syces hastily abandoned their hukas to listen, and at a respectful distance the villagers too had assembled *en masse*.

The beautiful Miss Sahib, with the little sitar, and the voice of a ‘ kol,’ made, with her slender white shape, a charming picture against a background of

the dark mysterious forest. As the last notes died away, there was no sound beyond a low appreciative murmur, and the envious screech of the Burra Ooloo, or big owl.

The heat increased to such an overpowering extent that Milly for the present declined to enter the Bandi or seek further adventure, and contented herself with the village, and rides in its vicinity. When the shooting party returned with (or without) tiger, they found a charming semi-hostess, ever ready to applaud or sympathize. At dinner she sat facing Colonel Tristram, beautiful, interested, and animated; and it became more and more his dream and desire that she should become his *vis-à-vis* for life! Sport was capital (although minus the one-eared tiger), and several fine skins were pegged out—including that great rarity, a hunting cheetah. An important beat had been organized, and Milly requested her brother when making arrangements to see that she was included in the party!

'I have been extraordinarily good,' she declared, 'for eight whole days, riding about on Sirdar all alone. Now, I want to see something just for once—please put my name, so to speak, in the pot!'

Exciting 'khubber' had recently been brought in; and it was believed that a good shot (or two or three good shots) would rid the world of the 'Mordongri' man-eater. Colonel Tristram arranged that Trafford and his sister were to share a machan, and Jadoo was unexpectedly chivalrous in his anxiety to please, and accommodate a lady. The celebrated tiger was said to be in a khora or ravine, about eight miles from camp. Beaters were collected. As this was to be a silent drive, and at night, the party set out long before sundown; the road lay through the forest and a thick prickly cover, and Milly, who had never penetrated so far, was struck by the heavy sweet scents that hung in the warm atmosphere, and the extraordinary variety of leafless flowering

trees. Here was a thin naked trunk, decorated with gorgeous scarlet blossoms ; there, another stretching its silver-grey arms through showers of exquisite purple blooms ; white, blue, and rose abounded ; but among them all the heavily perfumed yellow mohowa held its own. She was also surprised at the number of birds, large birds, small birds, gay birds, dowdy birds, complete strangers—but she recognized the ubiquitous green parrot, the blue jay, the impudent quarrelsome koopoo, and the easily domesticated brown mina,—all apparently darting about in search of the meal of the evening. Old Jadoo had made careful preparations near a water-course, and selected three strong trees for machans, into one of which Trafford climbed, dragging his sister after him.

The light had begun to fade, and the pale cool moon struggled with the passionate glow of a hot and dusty sunset. As Milly sat curled up beside her brother, scarcely daring to draw breath, birds were going to roost, a frog raised a lazy croak, a bat whirled close to her face, and then by gradual degrees, sleep settled upon the jungle. For an hour, for two—for three hours—Milly remained motionless, cramped and alert ; at last she believed she saw a stealthy grey shadow slowly emerge from the opposite bank of the stream, and gave her companion a sharp nudge. (What was rabbitting to *this*?) The great animal was peering at something ; he halted, and was no doubt a tiger that exercised caution ; satisfied with his inspection, he presently crossed the bed of the watercourse with leisured dignity, the dead leaves crackling beneath his ponderous deliberate pugs. Now he had mounted the bank ; the tiger—a real tiger ! was within forty yards. Milly felt her heart plunge ; it seemed to be knocking at the roof of her mouth. ‘ Bang ! ’ went the rifle beside her, and as the smoke cleared off, there on the edge of the moonlight lay the great

prize, grunting and gasping ; one more convulsive roll over, and the mortally wounded man-eater stiffened into the repose of death.

' After all, it seems so ridiculously simple, and not the least dangerous ! ' the young lady remarked, when her brother and Scruby had helped her to terra firma ; ' you sit in trees, the tiger happens to stroll by, and you, so to speak, pot him ! '

' Not so simple as you think,' rejoined Dene, who had never shot one. ' It takes a lot of Bundobust and planning. Of course, you had the best post, and I never got a look in,' he complained peevishly. ' As to danger, there is a sâl tree in the Johore district, with the marks where a tiger came and clawed a man out of it—and killed him—yes, and *ate* him too ! '

Naturally there was loud jubilation in the village over the death of the man-eater, when carried on a pole, preceded by torches, he was borne to the camp. The claws were presented to Milly, the lucky whiskers were with difficulty retained, the fat—sure cure for rheumatism—was bestowed as required, with noble liberality. But this was Miss Trafford's first and last appearance at a tiger beat. A piece of information from indiscreet Mary Ayah had been the death of her enthusiasm.

' Do you know why,' she had asked, ' these little buffaloes are brought into camp ? What are they for ? '

' For the sahibs, missy,' Mary replied, ' to tie up and tempt tiger. Tiger kill and eat—when plenty full sleeping—then jungle beat, and shooting ! '

Here, indeed, was a lurid light thrown upon sport ! Milly was profoundly stirred, as she recalled having noticed a little ' hela ' (or young buffalo) in the starlight, totally unconscious of danger, standing at his picket innocently awaiting his fate. At the time, it had seemed to her rather strange to see an animal with its pile of fodder tethered in the

forest—where all are free. Now she understood. Oh yes !

' Hela plenty cheap,' explained Mary, ' village people never giving cow.'

Miss Trafford lost no time in expressing her opinion of such an odious and cowardly sacrifice ; the horrible cruelty to the buffalo, the shameful treachery to the tiger.

' After this enlightenment, tiger shooting no longer had any interest for her, she absolutely refused to countenance—or even hear of it.

Vainly did her brother argue, plead, and explain.

' But look here, Milly, the buff would have been killed one day ; you will admit *that*. His premature fate has no doubt saved hundreds of animals from a tiger who is a cattle lifter. Do you know that a full-grown tiger can do with one of a herd every four days ? First he has a hot dinner, next a cold ; a couple of fasts, and then another victim—say, two a week—fifty-two weeks—and one little buff saves so many.'

But Milly indignantly refused to be persuaded ; the ' tying-up ' was cruel ; unfair to tiger, and buffalo ; and entirely opposed to all honourable principles ; indeed, over the discussion with her brother and Scruby, she grew quite excited and eloquent ; and, amazing to relate, Scruby, the keenest of shikaris, instead of backing up his friend Trafford, seemed actually inclined to take the part of his sister ! Had Mr. Castellas been present during the controversy, he would have had every reason to exclaim, ' Most extraordinary ! '

## CHAPTER XXVII

## MANGO LEAVES

IF Miss Trafford no longer lent her countenance to tiger shooting, she still made herself contented at the base of operations—in other words, the camp—which had been moved by gradual degrees nearer to Chandi, and was usually pitched in the vicinity of a village. She rode in the early mornings, sallying forth soon after the false dawn ; later she read, wrote letters, dallied with her embroidery, and low be it spoken—overcome by the drowsiness of the noon-day—slumbered.

Miss Trafford was not always thus deserted and abandoned to the society of Henry. Sunday was invariably a day of rest, and sometimes the entire party remained in camp in order to give the beaters, shikaris, and themselves time to draw breath. On one occasion the young lady was favoured with the company of Mr. Dene ; he was not sufficiently hardy, energetic, or enthusiastic to prove a true sportsman. Naturally indolent, he abhorred sustained effort and exertion, but he was also incredibly vain, and fond of display. It was this that had driven him forth from his cool stone-built quarters, into the fierce merciless heat that beats upon a tiger shoot. He was determined to show his prowess as a sportsman, to surpass the bags of his brothers in arms, and to consume their hearts with envy and despair. Hitherto he had laboured under the impression that a tiger shoot was a nice soft job—easy riding on elephants, easy shots, splendid skins, and triumphs toasted in iced champagne. And what was the real truth ? Long wearisome rides, and even tramps through scorching yellow dusty jungles, crowned by the success of others ; aching bones, and tepid beer ! Bored, disappointed, a very pin-cushion for thorns,

blistered and irritable, he indulged himself with a well-deserved holiday.

Mr. Dene and Miss Trafford were not congenial spirits—though he still admired her. She was, in his opinion, much too fond of laughing at a fellow, and was always on the crest of the wave ! To her he seemed a mere boy, passionate, effeminate, conceited—surely there was Southern blood in his veins ? In argument, his voice rose, his uncontrolled temper flamed up and betrayed him. What violent gestures, and oh, how his eyes blazed !

On the morning when they two were left *tête-à-tête*, she made the best of circumstances, listened patiently to his lamentations and complaints ; his bitter regrets for his motor and his valet, his determination to cut the Service, and settle down at home—India was, in his opinion, no place for a white man.

But after a substantial ten o'clock breakfast, she saw him no more ; he had succumbed to iced beer and heat, and spent the shining hours in the dim retirement of his tent, sound, sound asleep, totally oblivious of the existence of Miss Mildred Trafford, who accepted the situation with unruffled serenity.

Not so when Mr. Eliot Scruby remained in camp with an injured hand. A thorn had run deep into the palm, and left an ugly wound. Oh yes, there was no mistake about it ; but Colonel Tristram entertained a private suspicion that this wound had been made on purpose (and for a purpose). *He* was not blind—but to what end ? What was the use of this undoubtedly painful excuse ? A girl of the type of Miss Trafford would never look at a fellow like Scruby, who had no money, no prospects, and was always playing the fool ! However, it was an unanswerable fact that it was useless to urge a man out to shoot, who could not hold a gun ; therefore Scruby was excused, and took a day ' off ' with undisguised satisfaction.

And to him, at least, this was a day of unalloyed

happiness. Miss Trafford dressed his hand herself, with oh, such delicate clever fingers ! and their talk was much more personal and intimate than usual. Hitherto he had not dared—she had not cared—to be serious ! They argued and quarrelled and agreed, and as the midday heat abated, wandered into the jungle, and collected strange flowers and strange butterflies. Scruby introduced various novelties to the notice of his companion ; for instance, the Gubdee, or ‘torch’ tree, a small tree with straight, fleshy, tapering branches, and a bark of deep pink, which exudes a kind of resin, and the branches when dried are used by the natives as flambeaux. There was also the Kuchnar, or geranium tree, covered with flowers exactly resembling the old-fashioned, mottled geranium, which ornaments so many English cottages.

On these were noisy swarms of bees and insects, and hovering over them a flock of beautiful birds, known as the ‘rose-coloured pastor,’ a kind of starling with pink plumage ; the humming of the insects, and the chattering of the birds in their busy search for honey in the blossoms, made conversation impossible ! Scruby and Milly, such was the noise, could hardly hear themselves speak.

From the jungle they strolled into the village, for Milly was as curious as ever respecting the natives of the country. This particular ‘busti’ was Gondi, its name ‘Kukdikhapa,’ which signifies the Village of Fowls. The community were notoriously sporting, and kept not merely the useful Moorghi of the country, but celebrated fighting-cocks, quails, bulbul, and partridges, and these they backed heavily at many local meetings. The Miss Sahib, who was in quest of lac bangles, pottery, and huka heads, entered the Village of Fowls, escorted by Scruby, and attended by Mary Ayah.

‘Jungle flowers are all right, but I cannot understand what attraction you can find in a grubby little busti,’ he remarked.

' I am interested in the primitive people who live entirely secluded from the world, and out of the beaten track ; seeing them and talking to them is like going back—say, a thousand years.'

' I must confess I see no catch in going back a thousand years ! Let me think ? my history is a bit shaky. It would be before the time of Alfred the Great—when England was half forest and morass ; and food and clothes were painfully scarce. No, no, thank you, Miss Trafford, you must return to those times alone.'

' But do think of the quiet "no bother about anything" existence of these people—no mental wear and tear—no hustle—a life completely out of the world, a sort of Garden of Eden.'

' So that is your delusion ! The world is the world all the world over. These jungle folks have their desperate quarrels, love affairs, money worries, social ambitions, just the same as *we* have ! Of course on a different plane—and I bet you anything you like, that this village we are making for has its own little "sets," and that one Mrs. Gond sniffs at another Mrs. Gond.'

' Oh, that is merely caste ! ' she answered airily.

' Merely caste ! ' he repeated ; ' is not caste the crucial question all over the universe ? '

' Well, at any rate you cannot deny that these people live in the same way, and in the same place, as their forefathers have done for centuries ? '

' Not altogether, thanks to the Raj. The villagers have their vernacular schools, dispensaries, post office and telegraph. Think of that ! Possibly in some remote parts, the happy aborigines still slumber and live in what you call peace ; but I realize that you set your face against progress—it's not romantic or interesting. You prefer squalor and ignorance—don't you ? '

' Mr. Scruby,' turning on him quickly, ' how can you say such things ? You know perfectly well——'

'Here we are! For goodness' sake, don't let us be seen having a row in the street—it would be a scandalous example. Listen, Miss Trafford. Let us declare a truce. I hereby solemnly and humbly subscribe to everything you say and wish, for the next twenty-four hours!'

They were now proceeding through a straggling lane, lined with wattled huts, for the most part standing in little plots of cotton plants, onions, gourds, and chilis. This was by no means the young lady's first visit to Kukdikhapa, and in a certain doorway a broad-faced elderly woman with whom she had had dealings, salaamed and grinned a welcome.

'I must ask if she has found me any bangles,' said her customer, entering the hut as she spoke.

There is not much to be seen in a Gond dwelling; a plastered mud floor, a charpoy reared against the wall, cooking pots, an axe, an iron spoon, a hasi, or sickle, and a broom. There was also on a shelf a multitude of little figures.

'Do see,' cried Milly, introducing them with a wave of her hand, 'the family gods!'

She turned and appealed to the old woman in broken Gondi, who nodded and beamed upon her.

'The souls of departed relatives are represented by these tiny stones; imagine that lump of vermillion a soul! And why vermillion? I wonder what colour my soul would be?' and she glanced at Scruby.

'White, of course,' he promptly replied.

She blushed and laughed, and said—

'Such compliments are out of place in the jungle.'

'It was not a compliment—merely a statement,' he answered, with composure.

'Have you noticed the poor little garden,' she continued, pointing to a sort of back entrance, 'and this woman, Naromi, is so proud of it. The fat girl is her granddaughter; they think no end of their

two cotton trees and five gourds ! What small things satisfy these people and make them happy ! Not like you and me—we ask for so *much*.'

'Yes,' he answered ; 'I'd like to ask for something far beyond my reach.'

'Oh, I know all about it,' she answered eagerly.

'*You* know ?' he repeated, changing colour.

'Yes, Philip told me. I warn you—that he tells me everything. (Did he ?) You are dying to be moved to a civilized station, where there's a theatre, and you can start private theatricals. Simla would suit you ; but Phil says he is afraid you will have to be satisfied with Jubbulpore !'

'So that is my ambition, is it ?' he answered, looking at her gravely. 'And yours, Miss Trafford ?'

'Just now all I want to make me happy are one or two quite perfect lac bangles. Mary is bargaining, as you see. Oh, do look at all the people in the doorway !'

The doorway was blocked up with a crowd of women and children staring in at the white Miss Sahib with the white gown.

The Gondi girl came forward, and shoo'ed them away, as if she were driving fowl ; for a moment they dispersed, but immediately returned, precisely the same as a flock of persistent, inquisitive chickens. Meanwhile Mary and Naromi were earnestly conferring—the latter's eyes fixed all the time on Mary's mistress.

'What does she say ?' inquired Milly. 'I know she is talking about *me*.'

'She says green bangle—what you please.'

'Then I please two rupees—and is that all ?'

'No, Miss Sahib,' and Mary grinned and jingled her earrings, 'this woman here plenty sorry you not married. I telling that never custom in your country till *quite* old. She say, I telling lies. You not ugly—why not married ? This girl—her grand-datter—married three months ago,' and Mary waved her

hand from the Gondi girl to Milly, as if enforcing a comparison between them. Certainly the two types were as the poles apart ; the Gondi, a broad squat figure with a flat face, coarse black hair, her sole garment a rusty red sari, did not even wear the usual little chowli or jacket. The pride and glory of her existence was an extraordinary profusion of coloured glass bangles, which half-covered her muscular arms. What a contrast she presented to the slim, graceful English girl with beauty and intellect in her face ; her simple white cambric frock, a model of modest elegance.

' If the lady is not married,' proclaimed the elder woman in Gondi, ' wherefore will not the young man who is with her, take her to wife ? Behold the marriage token ! ' and with a sudden jerk she dragged down a long wreath of withered mango leaves from the lintel of the door, and, deftly casting it over Milly's head, pointed to her companion. Scruby understood Gondi—it was part of his professional equipment—and instantly became crimson.

Milly's acquaintance with the language was fortunately not sufficiently advanced ; but the speaker's eye and gesture were eloquent ; and as she grasped the drift of her suggestion, her face flamed. She tossed aside the mango wreath with an air of angry repudiation that utterly abashed the genial matchmaker.

' What does she mean by covering me with her horrible dusty leaves ? ' she demanded indignantly.

' It is merely a form of expressing her good will.'

' I think she is extremely presuming ! '

' Oh, well, if you *will* go back a thousand years—you must expect the manners of the period ; the old lady may seem a bit rough, but it's only her playful Gondi way. She means no harm—on the contrary, there is no doubt she admires you enormously—they all do,' indicating the crowded doorway.

'I don't want either her admiration or her decoration,' rejoined Milly, who was recovering her composure, 'and the smell of turmeric and cocoanut is becoming too overpowering. Do let us depart.'

As she spoke, she moved towards the door, and the Gondi girl, stirred by an irrepressible impulse, suddenly stooped and laid her matted head on Milly's neat tan shoe, whilst her grandmother presented Scruby (for she was overawed by the lady) with a ragged bunch of yellow jungle flowers; and, having paid for the green bangle and distributed a few coins among the admiring crowd, the couple effected their escape.

As they walked back to the camp, they debated whether to go for a ride? or to remain at home—and be lazy? On the one hand, they could exercise the ponies and perhaps catch a breath of evening breeze; on the other, they agreed that riding in the hot weather, with a fierce blue-black sky overhead, and the parched iron ground under hoof, was no joy. So they decided to stay in camp and take things quietly; and gave orders for iced lemonade and biscuits to be served to them under a certain acacia tree, where they made quite a pretty Watteau-like picture, and became a centre of considerable interest to the several camp dogs.

For once they abandoned banter, argument, quarrelling, and chaff, and talked, as Scruby expressed himself, 'like two grown-up people at a dinner party.' They spoke of far-away England, and far-away people, and Milly for the first time learnt something of her companion's ideas, personal feelings, and belongings. His father was a parson in the enjoyment of a family living—presented by a cousin who lived in the adjacent Hall. He had two brothers, both younger than himself, one in the army, the other a middy in the Atlantic Fleet.

'You see,' he explained, 'when I started, my father was not so well off. I was mad keen to go

into the Service, but unfortunately there was no spare coin then.'

'Have you been home lately?' she asked.

'No, not since I came out five years ago. I hope to get off next year, but we have been shorthanded, and I'm so junior.'

'Who would suppose it?' she exclaimed; 'you certainly don't conduct yourself as a junior—or treat poor Mr. Maguire with proper respect.'

'Really—don't you think I do?' he asked, with delusive innocence.

'No, and you are so often irresponsible and flippant. I expect it's because you have no sisters.'

'No doubt,' he admitted gravely, 'it is not every one who has Trafford's advantages.'

'I suppose that is intended for withering sarcasm. Sarcasm is completely wasted on me, and I must tell you—that if you were my brother, I would—no—silence is best.'

Miss Trafford partly understood the art of leaving things unsaid.

'Thank goodness, I'm *not* your brother!' he rejoined. 'Just the very last thing I'd wish to be.'

'Thank you, Mr. Scruby,' and she bowed, with an air of frozen dignity; 'as I see you intend to be, and indeed are—rude—please go into the big tent and bring me my book. It is on the writing-table, and has a red cover.'

'No, no, no, Miss Trafford. I intend to be, as usual, everything that is agreeable and polite. I do, indeed; I give you my word of honour. Now let us continue our interesting conversation about home. There, at least, we are on safe ground. Oh, won't I enjoy a few months of the good old country! I say, what a change from this burnt-up, scorching land.'

'Yes, but do not forget our black frosts, and east winds. I love the English country too, I was brought

up in Mid-shire with my grandmother. Phil and I lived with her—it was our home.'

'I know, I've often heard him talk of it.'

'Such a dear old place, with nice bulging bow windows opening on to a lawn, and tennis ground, and a great walled garden with delicious strawberries and figs and pears. Then there were dogs and pigeons, and I had a horse of my own—but I was only allowed to hunt when Philip was with me. Inside, the house was crammed with all sorts of quaint things: samplers, prints, china, and beautiful *really* old furniture. There was always an atmosphere of pot-pourri and lavender; and grannie had delightful friends, and such nice fat good-tempered old servants, luckily for Phil and me.'

'It sounds ideal!'

'It was.'

'And rather a contrast to Chandi.'

'Yes; but here I am thoroughly happy. I love the East—it is all so strange and wonderful and beautiful. Do, do look at that matchless sunset!'

For some moments both gazed at the splendour of a golden rose sky, and its broken purple fissures; then with a little, contented sigh, Milly resumed—

'And then, you see, I have Philip! Oh, by the way, Mr. Scruby, he told me—and not as a secret—that you are engaged. I hope you will show me the photo, and tell me all about *her*.'

'Engaged?' repeated her companion, in a tone of indignant astonishment; 'he was humbugging.'

'Oh no, indeed, he was serious—very serious,' and she smiled at the recollection; 'a boy and girl affair, he said.'

'Then *I* was joking, and he took it for deadly earnest. Long ago, when we were in perambulators, my cousin twice removed—a kid who lived up at the Hall—was tremendously gone on me. I was seven, and she was six—such a shameless little flirt! We built a house in the pleasure-ground, and had a

wedding, and a bonfire, and went away in the gardener's wheelbarrow. Well, that dream is ended—the capricious Petronella married an officer in the Blues three years ago—and I am left !'

'Also in the Blues ?' suggested Milly.

'Need you ask ?'

'I cannot fancy you in anything but the best of spirits, Mr. Scruby. Why, you keep us all going.'

'I'm delighted to hear it ! Sometimes it's a bit lonely. You see, Philip has you ; Maguire has Maguire ; the Doctor has his dreams and his Jane Austen—and I've—nothing—but what they call my impudence.'

'Ah yes, that never deserts you, does it ?' she assented with a radiant smile. 'Don't you think, it was a little impudent of you—to personate *me* ?'

'Oh, by Jove !' springing to his feet, 'so it has got out ?'

'Yes, it "got out," as you call it, ages ago,' she answered, with composure. 'I was thinking of being angry—but Phil was furious enough for two.'

'It was the greatest piece of cheek ; and I've been frightfully sorry ever since—in fact, Miss Trafford—only that it might excite remark,' looking back at the lines where were the ponies, the servants' tents and cooking fires, 'I'd go down on my knees —here and now.'

'I will accept your apologies standing—but the next time——'

'There will be no next time,' he interrupted. 'You know very well that you are just the last person in the world I would wish to offend.'

'Am I ?' looking up at him with laughing eyes. 'I should not have suspected it. Why, think of all the rude things you've said to me this very afternoon. Oh, here they all come ! how *early* ! I wonder what they have got ?'

Dene cantered up ahead of the others, and flinging himself off his pony announced—

'A rotten day—awful fagging—the ice gave out too, and I didn't get a shot.'

'Oh yes, you did,' corrected Trafford, coming up; 'he winged a beater—luckily it's nothing much.'

'The man's own fault,' growled Dene; 'anyhow, I've given him five rupees! This is my third blank day, and so I'm off to-morrow for a spell at the Dâk Bungalow of our gay little metropolis, Chandi.'

'So, then, you are not so keen as you supposed?' inquired Milly, with a mischievous smile.

'No, by Jove! the heat, and dust and glare, take the gilt off the gingerbread. I've, however, some compensation—a cold tub, and a long iced peg!'

With which remark, Mr. Dene raised the flap, dived into the dinner-tent, and disappeared.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE BLACK ENAMELLED BANGLE

ALTHOUGH she bore tropical heat with surpassing fortitude, it was a novel experience for Mrs. Heron to spend a hot weather in Chandi; but as she was returning next year to England 'for good,' she decided to 'remain down with Tom,' and was eloquent and pathetic on the subject of such rare virtue and self-sacrifice. In truth, the lady was sick of picturesque Pachmari ('five caves'), the hill station of the Central Provinces: of the people who annually resorted there, of the scenes of repeated picnics and conventional flirtations,—and perhaps Pachmari was a little tired of her!

Moreover, she was a bridge fanatic, and amazingly lucky. Of late, other players were somewhat shy of the lady's company,—as she was credited with a 'roving eye' and an uncanny knowledge of hands.

Chandi, after all, was on a plateau a thousand feet above the scorching plains, and she would be comfortable enough in her own cool and darkened bungalow, with all the newest novels and every alleviation of the temperature that money could devise. Mrs. Heron was naturally and secretly superstitious, her nerves were highly strung; recently she was obsessed by a strange presentiment, a vague, dim, indefinite impression, that something was going to happen. After a period of blank monotony, a change was about to take place in Chandi—in what form she could not divine; but that it was approaching, she was confident. It produced, in its way, a sensation similar to that indescribable feeling in the atmosphere, which is a certain precursor of the breaking of the rains. Who or what would it affect? In what shape would it arrive? Did it mean death, triumph, success, or disgrace to one of the community? The oracle was dumb. After all, the possibilities were not very alarming, or likely to relate to herself. Mr. Baxter might lose his sight and give up the Mission—the Castellas be turned adrift—or Trafford fall victim to a tiger.

Meanwhile Chandi was hopelessly soporific, and its principal Mem Sahib welcomed the premature return of Dudley Dene,—although he was not a young man that she particularly liked, with his dark complexion, brooding, tragic eyes, and air of suppressed impatience. He had been shockingly spoiled on account of his wealth, and except on the important subject of bridge, they had not one single idea in common, and to her circle she made no secret of her opinion, that he had black blood in his veins—West Indian, no doubt!

Nevertheless Mrs. Heron invited Mr. Dene to tea, being anxious to pump him and to acquire the latest jungle news, and if Miss Trafford had succeeded in captivating Colonel Tristram? (the future Earl of Pulborough). That girl's hardihood in attaching

herself to the shikar party was the most audacious feat Mrs. Heron could recall in a world-wide experience. Mr. Dene, who declined the invitation to tea, was therefore asked to dinner, and most of the station were bidden to meet him ; the Castellas (five), Dr. Collins, Mr. Maguire, and Mr. Chapman ; all accepted, with the exception of Mrs. Castellas, who was feeling the heat, and her husband, who remained with her.

Mrs. Heron, wearing a rose-coloured diaphanous garment—peculiarly becoming to her lissom, voluptuous grace—received her guests in the darkened drawing-room, and presently they were all enjoying an excellent cold repast. The dishes were in aspic, the sweets were iced, the wines cooled to perfection. With the sole exception of the hostess, it was a 'white party,' from the tablecloth and punkah, to the snowy clad attendants, and the guests—the men in linen and cummerbunds, the young ladies in the thinnest of muslins. Joan Hampton's face was white too ; she looked wilted and faded, like a transplanted flower, whilst on the contrary, her half-sister seemed to flourish and expand in the heat of her native soil. Her full-blown lips were scarlet, her beautiful hair resembled a great bronze turban ; on the present occasion she had not been sparing of powder or patchouli, and was enjoying herself to her heart's content, seated close to Captain Gresham, and eating *pâté de foie gras*, with her big brown eyes rolling greedily in all directions.

Mr. Dene, robust and swarthy, was placed on the right hand of his hostess, and indulged his listeners with vivid accounts of his recent exploits ; he also gave particular details of his mysterious misses, and Trafford's unaccountable flukes. Possibly his conversational exertions induced a thirst, for, as dinner progressed, he drank a surprising quantity of the well-iced champagne, and became not merely loquacious, but indiscreet ! With callous indifference,

he thrust aside insidious questions respecting the young lady who was with the shooting party.

'Oh, she's all right!' he declared. 'She and Tristram are tremendous pals, and she has a ripping voice. The other night she brought the whole village out of their beds. She's not keen on shooting.'

'No?' exclaimed Mrs. Heron, in a tone of affected surprise. 'Then what can have induced her to face the heat of April in a tent—what *is* she keen on, do you know?'

'Her brother,' he answered shortly.

Mrs. Heron and Gresham burst into a simultaneous and derisive laugh.

'Yes; and by Jove, when Trafford comes back he will make no end of a row. He is mad keen about his work. This is supposed to be private, but I don't mind telling you, that he has got on the track of some one who has been making a regular business of selling the forest timber and lac—not to speak of horns and skins! He believes he can put his finger on the thief!'

'Oh, he can, can he?' said Gresham, and he smiled as one smiles at the absurd pretension of a child. 'You don't say so! He ought to be in your department, Chapman—you want a little fresh blood, eh? You haven't made a haul for years!'

'I always suspected there was a terrible leakage in the Bandi,' observed Mr. Heron. 'Frost was slack, and did not care—he let everything slide, and his subordinates had it all their own way.'

'I rather fancy you are wrong there, Governor,' argued Gresham, with a glare in his bold aggressive eyes.

'Oh no, I know what I'm talking about,' rejoined Mr. Heron, with dry decision. 'I've seen strings of carts creeping out of the forest at daybreak.'

'Yes, your own woodmen, I'll bet!'

'No, these men had guns; my fellows don't fancy working in the Bandi after dark.'

'Well, all the same, the smart new Assistant-Conservator has got hold of a mare's nest. These young enthusiasts are often made fools of.'

'Not easy for a man to make a fool of Trafford,' interposed Dr. Collins. 'Though we don't know what a *woman* might not do—eh, Mrs. Heron?'

Mrs. Heron shrugged her graceful shoulders, and drawled—

'Oh, pray don't refer to me! I am absolutely the *last* person to ask.' But as she spoke her eyes had a far-away look, and glowed with an unholy phosphorescence.

'Talking of the forest,' said Maguire, suddenly rousing himself, 'did ye hear that two of the late Rajah's wild elephants have been shot--both tuskers?'

'Where *do* you get hold of such rot? That's only a bazaar shave!' sneered Gresham.

'No, me boy! a true bill—they'd been dead a week, and with the thermometer at 100, I needn't remark, they did not take long to *find*! The tusks of both were missing. I'm told they were worth a thousand rupees a pair—'pon me word, it's a case of most impudent robbery! The District Commissioner has been notified, and will sift the business thoroughly.'

'Oh, will he?' exclaimed Gresham. 'I believe he is on leave.' Then in another key, 'I say, Maguire, you never go in for shooting, and you're a fine shot, like most Irishmen. How is that?'

'To tell the truth, it's too hard work, on the top of me other business, and in this weather. Poof!' and he mopped his face with a fragrant silk hand-kerchief. 'I like to take me pleasures at me ease, and look forward to the time at home, when I'll enjoy a strip of bog, and a stretch of river—that's all *I* ask for.'

'Eh, snipe and salmon—quite good enough for me,' declared the doctor. 'I'll come and stay with you, Maguire. Make a note of that.'

'Now we will leave you to talk shop,' said Mrs. Heron, rising—'woods and forests, cotton and grain—don't be long—as we want to have some bridge.'

In the drawing-room, two green tables were already set out with packs of cards and markers. At one of these, the hostess established herself, and Lily drew up beside her—offering her tasty morsels of bazaar gossip, and relating with much gesticulation of hands and wrists, how scandalously Government had treated poor Captain Gresham. 'Oh, they were so awfully suspicious, and fussy and prying; and over and over again he said how sorry he was he had ever set foot in Jambore—but fortunately for himself he was independent—and could afford to be his own master.'

'Tell me—is he going to marry you, Lily?' asked Mrs. Heron, as she put two fingers under the girl's round chin, and stared into her face with an expression of ironical amusement.

Lily glanced at her sister, who was languidly turning over the pages of a book, and then with a broad and defiant smile, that displayed most of her teeth, replied—

'Why, for whatt do you take him? *Of course!*'

'I wonder what he sees in you?' continued Mrs. Heron, with a frankly speculative gaze.

Before Lily could reply, the men sauntered in, and immediately the card tables were filled. At one, Dr. Collins, Chapman, and Mr. Heron settled down to humble 'Cut Throat'; at the other, Gresham and Mrs. Heron did battle with Mr. Dene and Maguire. Lily looked on, squeezing her chair between those of Gresham and Dene, whilst Joan removed herself and her book to a seat near a shaded lamp. The hostess did not think it worth while to trouble about Joan Hampton; she reckoned for little as one of her guests—a stiff young woman who had a queer sort of pride (declined to wear second-hand finery) and a sensitive conscience.

The hot weather is a proverbially trying season ; people's nerves become frayed, and their tempers inflammable. As bridge progressed, even good-natured Maguire was inclined to be short, whilst Gresham was unaffectedly insolent.

The game had been exceedingly close : Dene was endowed with what is called ' a card brain,' and he and Maguire proved to be a powerful combination — nevertheless they lost the first rubber. Dene was reckless and excitable, clamoured loudly for revenge, and backed his luck against Mrs. Heron for fifty rupees, and the lady, who loved a bet, instantly picked up the gauntlet. They were jealous players, both hot tempered, and their veins were pulsing with the true 'gambling fever.' The first game, which was played with a certain amount of acrimony, was won by Mrs. Heron and Gresham ; the second went to their opponents. With boisterous triumph the third—accomplished at racing speed—was scored by Mr. Dene with a 'No Trumper.' He did not prove to be a magnanimous victor, for he laughed, and bragged, and jeered. Then suddenly Mrs. Heron lost her temper, and a stormy scene ensued ; at last the altercation became so loud, that it compelled the players of 'Cut Throat' to rest upon their 'hands,' and look and listen in nervous amazement. Mrs. Heron angrily accused Dene of a Revoke—which accusation he as furiously denied ; trembling with passion, she stretched out her arm, and snatched up and examined his cards. Her eyes were literally blazing as she flung them across at him, and articulated the word—

'Cheat !'

Something in her frenzied gesture, the gleam of storm in her flashing eyes, instantly sobered her foe. His tanned face became suddenly yellow, great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, his countenance expressed horror and amazement, as he glanced from her face to a black bangle on her

wrist, on which the name 'Zella' was inscribed in diamonds.

'Zella is your name?' he asked thickly, as he suddenly bent towards her.

'What has that to do with *you*?' she retorted, turning on him the lightning of her gaze, her whole facial expression concentrated in her wonderful eyes.

'Why, of course Zella is the name of Mrs. Heron,' volunteered Lily in her high 'chi-chi' accent; 'it is in all her books—but Mr. Heron he calls her "Ell-la."'

Mrs. Heron hastily thrust the bangle up her loose sleeve, and leaned across the table, her breast panting, its rise and fall evident, beneath a too transparent covering.

'Will you tell me why you revoked, and denied it, and shuffled up the cards?' she demanded excitedly.

'Yes—if you will answer a question,' rejoined Mr. Dene, who seemed to articulate with difficulty, and visibly shook with the vehemence of his feelings. 'Were you not Zella—Newton?'

She drew back with a sharp jerk, precisely as if she had been struck; and all the cards in her clasp pattered to the matted floor.

'Ah, I see!' he continued, now speaking in gasps. 'Your answer is in your face. I was only eight years old—but it seemed familiar—and that bangle gave you away!'

Mrs. Heron remained motionless, leaning back and staring at him as if hypnotized, seemingly powerless to utter, or to move.

'I—I—played with it as a kid; I can swear to it—I learnt my letters from that diamond "Zella." Still shaking all over, he rose to his feet, and pressing his hands hard on the table in order to steady himself, he added dramatically, 'I have the honour to be your *son*!'

A strange death-like silence followed, during which

a great hot-weather insect boomed helplessly around the room. By this time Mrs. Heron had recovered her senses ; she turned her head away, as if to avoid some hideous sight, and cried—

‘ Oh, Tom, how can you allow me to be persecuted by this horrible madman ? Turn him out of the house at once ! ’

Tom, who had hitherto been an uneasy spectator, now laid a heavy hand on his guest’s arm.

‘ Mr. Dene, I must ask you to leave us.’

‘ Yes, yes, all right ; but first give me two minutes,’ urged the young man, now thoroughly sober and collected. ‘ I am not mad, drunk, or even lying. Let me tell you about my mother here,’ pointing at her as he spoke. ‘ She is half Cuban, half American. Her mother came from Havana, her father from New Orleans ; he was a shipping agent in Bermuda, and there my father, Anson Newton, a lieutenant in the Navy, met her—Zella Barrelle—the most beautiful girl in the West Indies ; and married her when she was only sixteen.’

Joan Hampton in the distance felt stupefied, as she looked on and listened. Was this a scene in a play ? a dream ? or was it really happening ? The silent white-clad group by the card table—among whom the hostess’s crimson gown seemed to assume a peculiar and sinister significance. Her attitude expressed guilt, defeat, and capture—as she lay back in her chair, with a face rigid as a mask. Maguire and Gresham nervously fumbling with pencils and markers, the others standing round as if in judgment, and the dark young stranger glancing from face to face with Mrs. Heron’s own black eyes !

‘ My father was a poor man, and often at sea,’ he resumed. ‘ One day I was left alone in our Southsea lodgings. My mother had gone away on his yacht with a rich South American. Before a divorce could be instituted, this man died intestate,’ pursued the accuser, speaking quickly, his hands with great

swollen veins now firmly grasping the back of his chair, ‘and *she* disappeared. When my father returned, I was banished to school—he could not stand the sight of me—I was so dark and foreign looking—an ugly likeness of my beautiful mother—and there was I, a miserable, whimpering, friendless little cur—that *no one* wanted !’

‘Oh, he is a lunatic—he is insane !’ burst out Mrs. Heron, half-rising ; ‘it’s all lies—devilish, damnable lies !’

‘One moment more,’ he implored, ‘and I’ve finished. I went to Sandhurst, and into a cavalry regiment. My father was rich—a relative left him a fortune and a name, and he became Newton-Dene. He died three years ago, and as my mother was never divorced—she is Mrs. Newton *still* !’

He paused, possibly to permit this astounding piece of news to sink into the intelligence of his assembled listeners.

‘And if further proof is needed,’ he resumed, ‘my solicitors are Wake & Keep, Lincoln’s Inn Fields. They will corroborate every word I have said. Now I have done ! None of you’—surveying the company with a comprehensive flash of his eyes—‘will ever see me again. If I’d had a decent mother’—here his voice broke for a second—‘I’d be a better sort of fellow. As it is—I hate the whole world !’

He made this startling statement with clenched fists, standing in the middle of the room ; then turned towards the entrance with headlong haste ; there was no door, merely a purdah, and he gave this such a savage wrench aside as he passed out, that the portière came down with a muffled crash, and proved to be in every sense the fall of the curtain ! The late Mrs. Heron—now Newton—uttered one long, ringing scream, threw up her arms, and collapsed in a dead faint upon the floor. Of all the company Joan Hampton alone remained to restore

her ; for, as with one consent, the rest of the guests quietly and awkwardly dispersed. No, this was not an occasion for ordinary thanks, and leave-taking ; as for condolences with Tom Heron—he would be a brave man who would have ventured to tender them !

And what a tale for Chandi ! a true tale—as the lady, with eloquent justifications, subsequently acknowledged. She posed as an injured, deserted wife, but shrewd Tom Heron had noticed the young man's face of abject horror as he confronted her ; and when their tempers were aflame, the undeniable likeness between mother and son was a most convincing argument. He raked carefully among the embers of his memory. Where had she been for ten years ? From the time she had abandoned her home, until he had been fascinated by the similarity of their symptoms at Carlsbad, and had become the slave of the captivating Mrs. Notwen—Newton spelt backwards.—What a history, or rather romance, she had woven of a consumptive husband, and of their agonized wanderings in search of his health ! This fiction had adequately accounted for her poverty, and amazing familiarity with fashionable foreign cures.

To all Zella's tears, tales, prayers, Tom Heron was as an image of stone, for he realized that he had been the dupe of a fascinating adventuress.

As for Mr. Dene, he took a precipitate departure for Secunderabad, merely leaving a note of brusque farewell for his relative and host.

Before Chandi had recovered from the shock of this young man's revelations, there came from the jungle yet another piece of startling intelligence. A runner had brought an express letter from Scruby to Maguire, asking for news of Trafford, who had left the camp for a few hours, and been missing for nearly two days.

## CHAPTER XXIX

## AN EMPTY CHAIR

THE shooting party had now been some weeks in the jungle, and when Milly Trafford was alone in the seclusion of her own quarters, disinclined to read, work, or write, she had ample leisure for reflection. One thought stood out prominently ; grim, dissatisfied, and persistent, it impressed on her that in turning a deaf ear to her brother's advice she had made one of the greatest mistakes in her life of twenty-one years ! The heat, to her Western experience, was not merely astonishing but actually fierce, like the embodiment of some cruel vindictive animal. The brazen sun was pitiless, fiery winds came in scorching blasts, driving parched, eddying leaves against the canvas, and the very tent ropes were hot to her hand ! She lay torpid in the thinnest of clothing, too languid to move ; the light was too dim to read by, for the interior of her dwelling-place had been darkened by cuscus tatties, and her sole associate, Henry, exhausted with squirrel-hunting, lay extended on the floor—to judge by his low, half-suppressed yelps still dreaming of the chase ! How the hours limped by ! And without, in the yellow, palpitating glare, furious blasts roared round her retreat, and angrily shook the tent pole in their violence.

Milly felt compelled to confess that she had been foolish, and for a girl just out from home a plunge into the April jungles was an act akin to madness. Phil had been eloquent and urgent, but as he was in his heart a little overwhelmed by this unexpectedly brilliant and determined sister, he had not put his foot down with sufficient weight ; nor was it altogether the heat and the discomfort, that distressed the young lady—the situation had some compensa-

tions. There was the dew-steeped early morning march, the delicious moonlight ride, and in moving from camp to camp, novelties of new surroundings, and above all the glamour and fascination of India !

No, it was not altogether the height of the thermometer, the long hours of idleness and languor, that caused the repentant explorer to look forward to a return to Chandi ; it was because, figuratively speaking, she stood between two fires ! Exceedingly sensitive to impressions, she realized that Colonel Tristram had slowly but surely developed into a would-be suitor ! Certain subtle indications pointed to this most unwelcome truth ; a glance, an inflection in his voice, a lingering hand-clasp. Hitherto she had looked upon him as a mere kindly acquaintance, a somewhat dull, middle-aged man, whose heart and soul were abandoned to sport. Colonel Tristram took no interest in politics, literature, music, art, or any single one of the burning questions of the day. His game-book and the *Field* were his sole studies ; the finding of a new planet, a new continent, or a new genius, left him cold and indifferent ; but intelligence of a remarkable 'head' would bring him in hot haste from one end of a continent to the other !

Latterly, as they rode together or strolled about a camp, he had become alarmingly confidential respecting his family, his plans, and his old father—a man of eighty—his intention to settle soon, to entertain, to reset the family diamonds, and open the town house.

'*Noblesse oblige*,' he sighed ; 'and of course my wife would like a bit of the London season. What do you say—eh ?' addressing himself pointedly to his companion, and looking into her eyes with searching significance.

'Oh, you must not ask *me* !' she protested, with a nervous laugh. 'Personally I detest the London season ; a treadmill of engagements that as a rule one hates !'

Immediately after this conversation she had

effected her escape—yes, for the present—but how was she to keep persistently aloof and fend off a threatening proposal? the reply to which would be the signal for a precipitate retreat to Chandi! And this was not the worst. There was yet another so-called ‘friend,’ Philip’s beloved Jonathan. Of late he appeared to have changed, and become older and more serious; to have lost his boyish buoyancy and his delightfully infectious laugh. At times he was silent and even *distract*. Was it possible that he cared for her? and beheld in Colonel Tristram a too formidable rival? Colonel Tristram was wealthy, and a notable *parti*, but oh, what a monotonous husband he would be! As to Eliot Scruby, he was full of surprises, and seemed to delight in exhibiting new characteristics; she liked his vitality, his energy, his caustic tongue, and his kind heart. But he was a mere nobody—a junior engineer, without interest or ambition; and yet he had attracted her from the first. His individuality was sharp-edged, and, alas! it was a painful truth, that his voice outside the big tent thrilled her; his entrance made a difference, and for all her outward self-possession, Miss Milly’s heart beat faster when in his company.

‘What would her mother say?’ and Milly sat up on her couch, threw back her damp hair, leant her chin upon the palm of her hand, and gravely considered the question.

‘They would be poor—he would be obliged to live in exile, and in out-of-the-way jungly corners of India, making roads and canals—and—and—’ the colour crept into her face, ‘they would be quite happy—oh, *so* deliciously happy!’

Ah yes—but—! But unfortunately the notoriously bold and irrepressible Mr. Scruby was too humble-minded and too diffident to speak!

Colonel Tristram’s party had put in a strenuous week and were taking a day off; writing up diaries, answering letters, strolling about in the vicinity of

the camp, inspecting the ponies, and the fine sambur and tiger skins, pegged out under the tamarinds. The April moon rose late, the sun's red rim had disappeared over the edge of the Western horizon—with that uncivil abruptness, which distinguishes its good-night to the Orient; it was dusk as the little company sat in long chairs outside the big tent, and watched the soft darkness of a tropical evening descend upon the landscape.

'How black it looks all round!' remarked the lady.

'I do wish Phil had not been sent for. What did that wild-looking Gond say?' turning to Scruby.

'That Ambado—who had big news for him—had fever and could not come in, but was only three "kos" away, so Trafford will be back for dinner. There is a nice tender young peacock that he would not miss for anything.'

'How I hate these mysterious excursions!' said his sister; 'why could not Ambado wait?'

'I expect it had to do with those two elephants who were shot,' volunteered Colonel Tristram; 'that is a serious affair, and the sooner the trail is followed up the better.'

'Nothing is ever found out in the jungle,' grumbled Milly. 'I believe there is a conspiracy of silence. Phil thinks that, do what he will, there is some evil influence secretly working against him—and I live in quaking fear of this mysterious horror.'

'Then allow me to appease your fears, Miss Trafford,' said Scruby. 'It's only evil-doers who don't like Traff; he is very popular in the district. They know he's as straight as a die, and puts nothing in his own pocket.'

'Mr. Scruby!' she exclaimed indignantly.

'Oh well, between you and me, such a thing has been done! The folk that clamour for all forest rights and wood and fodder are silly idiots. They know perfectly well that, thanks to the Sirkar and

forest laws, they get fuel and grazing for a mere song. I believe the yearly charge for a cow is only a couple of annas! Their rights are respected; but if there were no superintendent, the woods would be fired; and as to the game and grazing, every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost!—The stronger seizing the lion's share. There has been a lot of bad work in this *réserve*—wholesale thieving; but Trafford has put the brake on, and, as I tell you, he is well enough liked—except by just a few Budmashes.'

'Few but fit! I'm always afraid that some of these people who write letters—and worry—will do him harm.'

'Surely you are not nervous, are you, Miss Trafford?' inquired Colonel Tristram, bending over to look into her face with anxious solicitude.

'Not just yet, but if Phil is not here by say eight-thirty, I shall be a bundle of nerves!'

'It's a pitch black night; the moon does not rise till nine,' remarked Scruby, 'so give him a chance.'

'He has a lantern, or rather the Gond had,' observed Chapman. 'I expect he will turn up, as the Americans say, "on time."'

Dinner was delayed for a quarter of an hour, and when served the peacock proved tender as a spring chicken, the savoury and ices—yes, ices—and dessert were all excellent, but Trafford's place remained vacant; as to the reason why, the rest of the company exchanged many eager speculations.

Afterwards, sitting out in the open, the men smoked and invented excuses, and told yarns, till the great yellow moon slid over the tree-tops, the night breeze began to sough through the leafless forests, and the village fell asleep. Miss Trafford appeared to be out of spirits, she talked but little, declined to sing, and soon after the coffee cups had been removed, rose to say good-night. Milly was conscious of a sense of disquietude, a penetrating conviction that, like a

beast of prey in the dark adjacent forest, some *awful* trouble was lying in ambush for her! She was in no mood to appreciate Mr. Chapman's chaff, or Colonel Tristram's familiar stories, and craved to be alone—alone, if the truth were known, to cry. Before she withdrew, addressing her companions, she said—

'If you hear anything, I am sure you will let me know at once—won't you?'

As she stood there in her white gown in the silver lustre of the moonlight, looking from one to the other of the group with lovely tragic eyes, a more beautiful and appealing figure it would be impossible to imagine or behold.

Naturally her request met with a loud and energetic acquiescence, yet as soon as she had disappeared into her tent, there fell a curiously significant silence, and Scruby's face was grave enough as he said in a low voice—

'Thank God she's gone! I say—of course you all know that Gehazi has come back?'

'Yes,' agreed Tristram; 'luckily Miss Trafford did not spot him in the lines; this begins to be serious.'

'Begins!' echoed Scruby; 'it *is* serious! I'm off now to have a look round,' standing up as he spoke.

'And I'll come with you,' said Chapman, springing to his feet.

'And I,' said Tristram; 'we will all search.'

'No, no,' protested the first volunteer. 'Excuse me, Colonel, but I'll start out alone with Janoo and some beaters. We will be back, say, at eight o'clock to-morrow. Then you will be fresh and ready to relieve me—always supposing I've no luck—it's best in these cases to husband our energies.'

'All right, Scruby, and you will have the best of it. I don't fancy we'll put in a pleasant time with Miss Trafford.'

'No, poor girl,' said Chapman; 'she looked pretty

sick this evening ; but very likely Traff has only had a pip off Gehazi and is walking back.'

' If he can find his way,' supplemented Scruby.

' Oh, get along, you old Job's comforter ! ' cried Chapman—and Scruby went.

' Scruby is a tremendous pal of Trafford's—he is devoted to him.'

(' And not the only one of the family to whom he is devoted,' said Colonel Tristram to himself.)

' I must confess I don't like the look of things.'

' Neither do I. I feel anxious too,' said Chapman. ' I 'd have gone with Scruby—but although he does play the fool, he has lots of horse-sense, and we will work as the miners do in tides. I 'll turn in now. Mind, not a word to Miss Trafford about the pony. I 'll tell them to hide him behind the pipal tree—and cover him with a rug.'

As it happened, there was no occasion for these precautions to conceal Gehazi's white form from Milly. Indeed, she was barely in her tent before Mary, native fashion, imparted the news with outstretched hands, and breathless emotion.

' Oh, Miss Sahib, the white pony done come back, all dust and hot and broken bridle—and *no* master. Oh yea yo ! oh yea yo ! this very, very bad business. Poor Missy—what Missy going do ? '

' I shall sit up all night,' she answered, after a moment's silence, ' and when it is light, will go out and search for my brother myself.'

' Scruby Sahib done gone, taking shikari and lights and coolies—very clever—always *jildi*, that sahib ! Missy please lie down till morning—this sitting up no good.'

But Milly had a presentiment, and she could not rest, much less sleep. When, at eight o'clock in the morning, Scruby returned, tired, dusty, and completely baffled, he was met by a haggard girl in the doorway of the tent, a girl with hollow eyes, and a face of stony whiteness.

'I see you have not found him?' she began, in a hurried unsteady voice.

'No, not yet. Now, don't be uneasy, Miss Trafford, we are inclined to think he has gone in to Chandi.'

'But his pony is here!' she protested, in a tone of bewildered despair.

'Ah—so you *know*? ' dismounting as he spoke.

'Yes, it is no kindness to keep things back—indeed, I'd rather know. I'll not make a scene, or have hysterics, or bother you; but do please take me into your confidence, and tell me whatever there is to hear—as soon as strangers.'

This was another, an older Miss Trafford, wan, haggard, and composed; who would have supposed the girl had such pluck and self-control? As she stood pouring out tea in the tent for Colonel Tristram, Chapman, and Scruby, she was as collected as any, listened gravely to their speculations, and offered her own ideas and suggestions.

'I am not asking to go with you,' she declared; 'I know I would only be in the way. I'll be here, and have everything ready when—when—you bring him in.'

It was seven o'clock that evening when the party returned unsuccessful. They had no clue, except one; that Ambado was perfectly well—in fact, one of the most zealous searchers—and had sent no message. The jungle had been beaten all day—not for a tiger on this occasion, but a missing forest officer—and of the lost man there was not the faintest trace. It was useless to try and conceal this from his sister. She was on the watch at the tent entrance, ever alert, with straining eyes and ears; each little wisp of dust on the road had raised her hopes. Alas! Sister Milly, it was only a bullock cart or a flock of goats! Nearly two days and no sign, no clue, to Trafford; it seemed as if the earth had actually opened and swallowed him up in Israelitish fashion.

The search party did not spare themselves; never

had that jungle experienced such a determined and vigorous beat! Scruby was unrelaxing and indefatigable; spurred by the haunting sorrow of a pair of haggard eyes, his exertions, considering the season, were extraordinary. Noonday sun, midnight darkness, still found him riding, questioning, conferring with woodmen and Gondi trackers, and even summoning to his assistance the services of their ojhās or wise men.

It was late on the second night of his friend's disappearance, when, previous to making a fresh start, he entered the big tent to say a few encouraging words to Trafford's unhappy sister. He always professed to be hopeful—although it was extremely difficult to maintain that attitude in the presence of a girl whose wan, colourless face expressed the last extreme of anguish and suspense.

By the dim light of a swinging lamp he saw her sitting by the table, and as she rose and confronted him it seemed as if her wonderful beauty had entirely disappeared. She resembled a flower that had been seared and withered by the passing of some fiery blast. 'The Star of India' was now merely a girl with hollow eyes and sunken cheeks; her lips were cracked and pallid, her beautiful hair looked limp and damp.

'There is no hope!' she exclaimed; 'do not try to delude me. I shall never see Phil again—never. Oh, I don't think any one knows what he has been to me.' Her voice sank to a husky whisper as she added, 'He is all I have in the world.'

For a moment his friend remained silent, he could not muster any convincing rejoinder, and she continued with a world of misery in her voice—

'Something *terrible* has happened. I think he is dead, or he would have taken pity on my anxiety. It is thirty-four hours since he was here—nearly two days—and oh, what days!' raising her hands to her throbbing head.

'But I have not given up hope,' declared Scruby. 'This time I am going in another direction—one that seems unlikely, but yet may be the very place. Possibly, he has come to grief on Gehazi, and is unable to move. Thank goodness he took a water bottle—'

As he paused to contrive another and more telling excuse, from the distance came the long-drawn melancholy chorus of a pack of jackals bent on their nightly chase, and their weird cry, 'I smell dead white men! I smell dead white men!' seemed to the overstrung nerves of one listener, unusually emphatic and distinct!

'Oh yes, he is lost, lost, lost!' she exclaimed; her self-control suddenly deserting her, and sitting down, she buried her face in her arms, and burst into stifled, convulsive sobs.

For some moments her companion remained mute and irresolute, then he began to walk to and fro with his hands clasped behind his back. For once in his life Scruby found speech extremely difficult. At last he said in a firm, imperative tone—

'Listen to me, Miss Trafford.'

She raised her face slowly, and met his eyes.

'If Philip is to be found, I will bring him back to you—rely on me,' then, moving a step nearer and looking at her fixedly, he added, with intenser emphasis, and there was a thrill of passion in his voice, 'I vow to you here,' and he struck the table with his hand, 'that I will never rest—never return to Chandi—until I have recovered your brother—dead or alive.'

'Alive! Oh, if you find him alive!' and she caught her breath; 'if he could just speak to me again—I will do anything—anything in the world for you, Mr. Scruby.'

'Then, in that case, I will take a little payment in advance,' he rejoined, with a touch of his everyday manner; 'you must eat and drink and rest. When

I bring in Phil, who is to nurse him? Why, you look as if you needed a nurse yourself. Now please drink some of this coffee they have brewed for me,' pouring it out as he spoke, 'yes, and a bit of toast.'

She sipped the coffee obediently, but waved away the toast with a gesture of disgust.

' You must go and rest; you know you can do no good sitting up all night; the whole camp is asleep, and shows its sense. 'Good-bye,' he stretched out his hand and held hers tightly in his for a moment, then picking up his cap went quickly out of the tent, and immediately afterwards there was a loud clattering of rampant hoofs which presently settled into a steady swinging gallop, echoing, and re-echoing, across the sun-baked plain.

Milly rose and went out into the moonlight, listening till the sounds became fainter and fainter, and gradually died away into silence. Since Phil had been missing, Mr. Scruby had scarcely rested or slept; a friend in need was a friend indeed—next to her brother he stood prominent in her thoughts. From the first, a curious magnetism had drawn her to him—why? *Why?* As she stood motionless, vaguely attempting to analyse her feelings—

' Missy never coming?' inquired the drowsy voice of Mary Ayah, who, wrapped in a ghostly white cloth, was coiled up under the flap of the tent. 'Missy never sleeping—never eating—soon, soon die!'

On this occasion Scruby's quest proved successful; the following morning the missing man was brought in on a litter, alive, conscious, and not so badly injured as, considering his experiences, might have been expected.

After he had been refreshed by a bath, a meal, and a comfortable sleep, sitting out in a camp chair under the stars, Trafford related his desperate adventure, which had best be given in his own words.

## CHAPTER XXX

## THE SNARE

THE Gond with his lantern went ahead at a good  
bat ; we must have covered six or seven  
miles, chiefly through sticky black cotton soil, and  
seemed to get into a part of the forest that was  
strange to me. I was thinking of calling a halt,  
when all at once the guide and light vanished, and  
I was left in pitch darkness—not a nice experience,  
I can tell you ! I shouted and shouted, and Gehazi  
snorted ; he was afraid of something—and, to do  
him justice, he is no coward. When I dismounted  
and struck a match to see if I could make out the  
path, he reared up on end, snatched the reins out  
of my hand, and bolted. I ran after him a couple  
of yards, then suddenly the ground opened under my  
feet, and I felt myself falling down into a well, or a  
mine. I don't exactly remember how I got to the  
bottom, but I expect I was stunned, and some time  
coming to—possibly hours. At first I had a hazy  
notion that I was dead and buried, and then, by and  
by, when I did return to my senses, I felt uncommonly  
stiff, and found I'd broken my collar-bone, and was  
lying on something soft that had a horrible smell.  
Whatever it was, it did not move ; I felt it over  
carefully, and discovered that it was a large animal.  
When I struck a match I saw that my companion  
was a panther—dead, I should say, a couple of days.  
Then I understood the whole game in a flash ! Some  
Budmashes, believing that I was too hot on their  
tracks, planned to get me out of the way quietly—  
and no trace left. The Gond—with the false mes-  
sage—was a clever decoy ; he guided me to the  
trap straight as a die. Gehazi smelt the panther—  
that was what frightened him—and broke away.  
The arrangement was a rude affair, not the ordinary

pattern like a rat trap with a kid inside for bait, but made with branches, placed roofways, and covered with leaves over a natural fissure, which saved the labour of digging the usual hole. It was its depth—about forty feet—that preserved me—for the brute, as he plunged on to the bait, had fallen through headlong and broken his neck—otherwise I should certainly have been killed and devoured. Wasn't it a diabolical idea—a hole in the earth, and a ravenous beast! If it had come off I'd never have been found till Domesday! Luckily I had a water bottle, so I made up my mind to have a rare good fight for my life, and face the climb, determined if I could to disappoint my enemy. I think it must have been about six in the morning, for there was a sort of pale sickly light from above, and through the hole I'd made in the branches I felt there was some one looking down, but I lay doggo, and after a short time the figure slinked away—satisfied!

'Then I took a pull at the water bottle, and set my teeth hard and began to climb—Lord! such a job! Over and over I came slipping back; the sides were so slimy, and had next to no holding ground, the heat was stifling, and the effluvium from the panther awful—and that was not the worst! There were horrible efts and lizards—once a snake wriggled over my arm. Ugh!

'It seemed to take me hours to work myself up that forty feet, inch by inch. Sometimes I thought I'd have to give in. At last I crawled out, and lay there absolutely done. I could not have gone another foot—to save my life. Luckily no beast of prey came my way, and in the morning a Gond woodcutter discovered me. I was insensible—he believed dead—but seeing I was a sahib, he carried me off with the help of a woman to his own hut. There I came to—that was about one o'clock. They boiled a fowl for me and gave me buffalo milk, and

later on Scruby turned up and found me alive, but not exactly kicking—and that's all !'

'And pretty bad too!' exclaimed Tristram.  
'Which was the worst of your experiences?'

'Oh, the bottom of the pit—it was suffocating. I was nearly choked.'

'But at least there you were safe! Sitting by the mouth of the panther trap, you represented a sort of "Gara," a tempting meal awaiting any passing wild beast—totally unarmed—and unable to crawl away.'

'Yes, it was risky, now I come to think of it. Somehow I did not mind; I was so thankful to be up and out in the air. Certainly it was an experience—a night in the jungle—and not in a tree—the queer sounds and the strange creatures that only venture out after dark. Some looked so weird, so shapeless, and uncanny—just like prehistoric horrors—but I expect I was a bit off my chump!'

With the return of the lost member of their party, the camp broke up. It was nearly the end of April. Colonel Tristram had gained his heart's desire as far as game was concerned, but there was one prize that still eluded him, and this was Milly Trafford. She had recovered her spirits with the elasticity of youth, and was once more radiant and happy; and what a heart the girl had!—without any outward parade. It is generally conceded that camp life is a sure and searching test of character, and she had come through the ordeal nobly—always charming to look at and speak to; unselfish, cool, trim, and merry—even on the hottest day—ready with sympathy, keen about forestry and wild life, yet remarkably accomplished, a brilliant ornament at the head of any one's table—in short a treasure! But not, alas! a treasure that was disposed to be added to the jewels of the Pulborough family. To the definite question the young lady had given a soothing, friendly,

but decided No. This, however, is a secret known only to a pipal tree, and a couple of painted partridges.

Trafford (thanks to starvation, declared Dr. Collins) made a wonderfully rapid recovery, and after a few days ceased to limp about with his arm in a sling. When the party reassembled once again in the Club-house, it was to find that Mrs. Heron (so-called) had left for England, dispensing with all farewells or even the facile P.P.C. card. There was still considerable commotion in the little circle, for although Chapman failed to run Trafford's would-be murderer to earth, the District Commissioner had been more successful than Gresham had anticipated—and in Calcutta the sale of the elephant tusks was traced to the late Rajah's Secretary himself! Yes, there was no question about it; his letters and receipts were formally produced. A career of uninterrupted success had made the bold adventurer too reckless; although it was surmised that a warrant was about to be issued for his arrest, to the last he exhibited a brazen effrontery, patronized Colonel Tristram, belittled his best trophies, played and won a game of billiards, and disappeared the following morning; carrying with him Maguire's new portmanteau, and all the Club funds!

It seemed as if shock after shock were destined to shake jungly little Chandi. The exposure of Mrs. Heron—who was not Mrs. Heron—the flight of Gresham, and at a later hour of the same day it was discovered that Lily Castellas had also disappeared. Her mother had been in failing health for some time, and this news brought on a heart attack, to which ultimately she succumbed. Mr. Castellas, thus bereft of wife and daughter, was taken home by kindly Dr. Collins, and Joan, after a day or two with Milly Trafford (who proved herself a prospective sister), was claimed by the Kennedys, and subsequently summoned to England by those grand

relations of which her mother had so frequently boasted.

All these surprising events occurred just before the rains, and with the first downpour the station became in every particular more cool and normal.

The secret malpractices of Gresham were disclosed by degrees ; he was the agent of the horn merchant —he it was who was the backer of his bustling colleague, 'Mr.' Beaufort, he who robbed Government and the Rajah of Jampore—subsequently squandering his ill-gotten gains on up-country racecourses, in clubs and hotels, where he scattered money with an ostentatious magnificence, and enjoyed the prestige of being a millionaire ! On inquiry, it turned out that Gresham really was a man of good birth and education ; an extraordinarily clever, and unscrupulous scamp. It was also true, that he had been in the Service, but was ignominiously compelled to retire, owing to some shady business respecting his company's accounts. Subsequently he had descended on India, where he impersonated a cousin and namesake, who happened, poor fellow, to be in retirement in a lunatic asylum.

The fate of Lily Castellas was never positively ascertained ; but a sleek and swaggering individual closely resembling 'Captain' Gresham was encountered in Melbourne. This gentleman had married the rich widow of a man in the wool trade ! a suitable consort for one who in his time had fleeced such a numerous flock. Mr. Castellas returned to his relations in Calcutta, respectable and well-to-do folk whom his late wife had always steadily ignored. Perhaps one of his really ingenious inventions will yet bring him fame and money ! By the last accounts he was engrossed in the construction of an elaborate biplane, and not merely sanguine but absolutely confident of success. May his prediction be fulfilled !

The station had subsided into its normal state of

stagnation, when it was once more stirred to its utmost depths by the announcement of Miss Trafford's engagement to Mr. Scruby ! She had, in a time of terrible mental stress, promised to give him anything he asked for, and this bold young man had taken her at her word. Scruby, who had been the means of restoring her brother, now proposed to separate the pair, and break up their happy little home ! He had been granted his long overdue leave to England, and had, with his usual foresight, booked passages for *two*.

'And to think of a fellow like Scruby daring to raise his eyes to Miss Trafford !' said Maguire, looking unusually red and fierce. 'A girl who could have had her pick of the best !' (Himself, no doubt, included.) 'Fancy asking such a beauty to marry a half-fledged chap like him ! Only five years' service—and not a hair on his face ! It was like his infernal impudence—his incredible effrontery !'

'*De l'audace—de l'audace—toujours de l'audace,*' quoted Dr. Collins, with twinkling eyes. The match had his cordial approval.

'Audacity !' growled Maguire. 'I call it pure cheek !'

'Well, yes, the young lady certainly has an exquisite complexion.'

'Bah ! I'm not joking,' he protested angrily. 'It's a shocking bad match for Miss Trafford. I'd give a good deal to hear what her mother will say !'

Lady Wakefield was justly incensed, and every bit as furious as even Mr. Maguire could desire. 'A miserable pauper husband for Milly, and all Philip's fault ! Of course he had thrown his sister at the head of his particular friend.' However, after some extremely acrimonious protests, the outraged parent submitted to fate—since the sole alternative to this disastrous affair was to summon her daughter to England !

The wedding took place quietly in Chandi, and the little old church was decorated for the occasion (by special desire) with the rarest jungle flowers. The Kennedys were present, Mr. Cope the ever-travelling chaplain officiated, and Trafford with cordial goodwill gave his sister to his friend. The bride wore a simple white travelling dress, and a marvellous hat, wreathed with exquisite roses ; her face, too, was wreathed in smiles. Miss Trafford had never looked more lovely, so declared the assembled company, who had flocked into the station from far and wide to see the triumphant Gosling carry off 'The Star of India.' A breakfast to no less than seventy guests was given at the Club, and proved a right merry gathering ; even Maguire had temporarily emerged from gloom. Henry, wearing an enormous satin favour, sat upon the bride's knee, and discovered an unexpected appetite for almond paste.

Subsequently, amidst a tempest of rice and old shoes, the happy couple started for Pachmari, where they proposed to spend the brief honeymoon. The modest Scruby did not divulge his social importance until the settlements were actually in hand ; it then transpired that his father, the Reverend Septimus Scruby, had by the death of two relatives been advanced to the position of next heir to the family estates—and title ! Eliot was his eldest son—and even from Lady Wakefield's point of view an excellent match for her daughter Milly ; who, when a peeress, could (and she would) walk into a room before her own mother !

There have been many changes in Chandi since that day in the rains, when Trafford, escorted by Scruby, rode into the station from dead-and-gone Pahari. The Brights have rented and done up 'the Castle,' and it is whispered that the 'pretty Miss Bright' cherishes good hopes of Mr. Maguire—men have been taken on the rebound !—but it is much more probable that he will throw the handkerchief

to a certain charming god-daughter who has come out to visit the Kennedys.

Mr. Heron, who gave Milly a valuable present, has signed a new will, and invited a widowed sister to keep house for him—the former mistress of the Herony having failed in her efforts to recapture ‘Tom.’ Nevertheless he makes her a liberal allowance, and she lives as Mrs. Heron Newton-Dene in great respectability and a red-brick villa somewhere between Bournemouth and Poole.

Trafford misses his sister and Scruby; he finds existence dull and solitary; of an evening he and Henry keep one another company in the verandah, and each in their several ways realize that something is lacking! If Henry could speak, he would declare without hesitation that it was a *lap*! A man’s *lap*—there is no such thing!

And if Trafford would speak? We know that Trafford has spoken. Indeed, it is an open secret that between him and Joan Hampton there exists an ‘understanding.’ As his successful exertions in the forest have been acknowledged by three months’ privilege leave, he has arranged to start for England directly after Christmas, and his friends confidently believe that Trafford will not return—alone.

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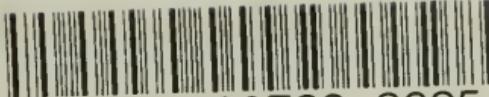
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